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ISSUE 46

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Welcome September



WHAT WOULD YOUR ultimate weekend break be? If you watch those travel website TV ads then it could be a beautiful hotel room in Barcelona or an inspiring view from a balcony over the azure Mediterranean in

Italy. But if you're an outdoor fitness type you'll of course eschew all that frivolity. Your room will be a tent, your all-inclusive deal will require cooking outdoors and your views, well they could be literally anywhere home or abroad.

You'll not be constrained by what those last minute deal websites try to sell. As good as they may be; could they promise you a view of Hadrian's Wall, or the Anglesey Coast at walking distance and with a different view every morning? That's what you can achieve if you take a tent (and other camping gear) with

you on your travels. Our special backpacking issue includes the views, the gear and the stories that will inspire you to spend some time under the stars, in the open, living close to nature and providing for yourself (OK heating up your rations and popping to the local).

Did you know that wild camping is allowed anywhere in Scotland, and that you could "sort of" pitch your tent most places in England, even if signs say "trespassers will be prosecuted"? Now for no second are we saying that you should pitch up and err pitch up your tent on the grounds of your neighbour's back garden, but understanding the law (and it's by no means straight forward particularly in England), will help you decide where you can wild camp and what you're required to do (and what not). Turn to page 44, to find out more.

I mentioned Hadrian's Wall, well Jonathan Manning took off for a spot of weekend hiking and camping along the Wall. As he says it's

possible to hike in a single weekend all of the principle highlights, with a perfectly placed mid-way camp. Turn to page 36.

Our gear coverage as I also noted devotes most of its pages to backpacking kit; so you'll be able to venture out and stay out safely with the best kit. Stoves, mats, tents and the like are covered in the section starting on page 96.

And regards other content for this issue, well I hope you'll agree it's equally action packed and inspiring. Maxwell Roche does a spot of "3D trekking". He goes freerunning with the legendary Sebastien Foucan, see page 54. And for some equally hot action – although using a different meaning of the word hot, you can read how ultra running stars Donnie Campbell and Andrew Murray took on the Namibian desert, see page 32. In a way theirs was a wild camp, albeit with 550km of running thrown in for good measure.

JOHN SHEPHERD Editor

HEROES OF THE MONTH



DONNIE CAMPBELL AND ANDREW MURRAY The Scotts took on the Namibian desert, achieving 550km. Andrew said, "... a challenge must have an element of danger....", and this one certainly did. **Page 32.**



SIR RANULPH FIENNES At 71-years-old, SRF is still pushing his body to the limit. He tackles the Marathon de Sables and explains why he wants to raise £20 million before, as he puts it he "cops it" **Page 40.**



SEBASTIEN FOUCAN Anyone who can fight 007, on a crane hundreds of feet high, and then wear lycra tights around London has to be a hero! Maxwell Roche trains with the king of freerunning. **Page 54.**

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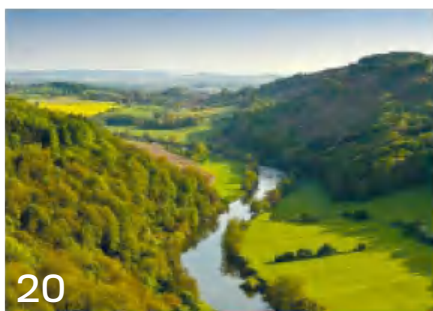
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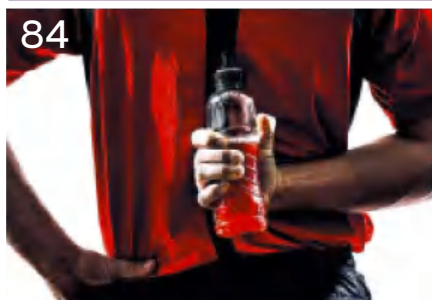
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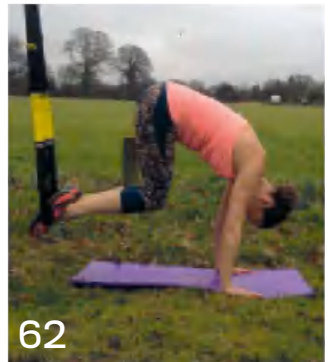
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THE GREAT OUTDOORS

Ride to the Tour of Britain, watch the pros hurtle past – any Strava records you may have on the route are err likely to be toast.

Picture Sweetspot

TOUR OF BRITAIN

It's tricky to play tennis on your way to Wimbledon, or swim to the London Triathlon, but road cycling is different. With a little planning and an early start, fans of the sport can ride to a grandstand view of the action.

The Aviva Tour of Britain, which runs from the 6th to the 13th of September, gives cyclists a golden opportunity to get up close to the action as world famous riders hurtle past. Previous participants include Mark Cavendish, Nairo Quintana and Sir Bradley Wiggins, but teams had yet to be announced for this year's event as *Outdoor Fitness* went to press.

The eight stages of the 2015 race pass through some of Britain's most spectacular landscapes, including Snowdonia, Lancashire's Forest of Bowland, the Scottish Borders, Hadrian's Wall, and both the Lake and Peak Districts. Only from a roadside vantage is it fully possible to appreciate the speed at which the professional peloton rides – any Strava records you hold on the route of the race are likely to be obliterated. Sorry!

More info: For full route details of the eight stages, tourofbrampton.co.uk







**WATCH THE
VIDEO**

<http://of.gy/ig7mJ>





THE GREAT OUTDOORS

**Remember climbing trees
as a youth - fancy a giant
redwood 77 metres high?**

Picture Keith Ladzinski/Red Bull Content Pool

GO CLIMB A TREE

Remember those days of shinning up trees, scraping skin off knees and elbows, and then tumbling from a low branch into nettles? Nowadays it's injuries from crashing off trampolines rather than falling from trees that fill the queues at A&E, but for anyone who can recall golden summers mucking about with mates in woodland, the equally golden memory of a good tree climb lingers on.

American climber Chris Sharma has taken this one step further, temporarily deserting the towering limestone cliffs of his adopted Spain to return home to California and climb a giant redwood tree.

Sharma decided to free climb the tree, using just hands and feet but no spurs to dig into the bark. The trunk in question soared 77 metres, with 50 metres of pure bark before he reached the first branch. This presented a serious challenge, with the myriad patterns in the bark making it impossible to remember hand and foot holds as he might on a rock face.

"As rock climbers, we're trained to look at cliffs and see the sequence. On the redwood, I drew a blank. I got disoriented by all the patterns," he said.

But the experience proved hugely rewarding.

"For me, climbing has always been about reconnecting to that playful side. It can be so serious. You put your heart and soul into a hard rock project. But it's also good to take a step back and remember that this is supposed to be about having fun."

THE GREAT OUTDOORS

Cycle 100 miles on a penny-farthing! Scottish adventurer Mark Beaumont puts in a “Stirling” effort!

Picture Ed Smith

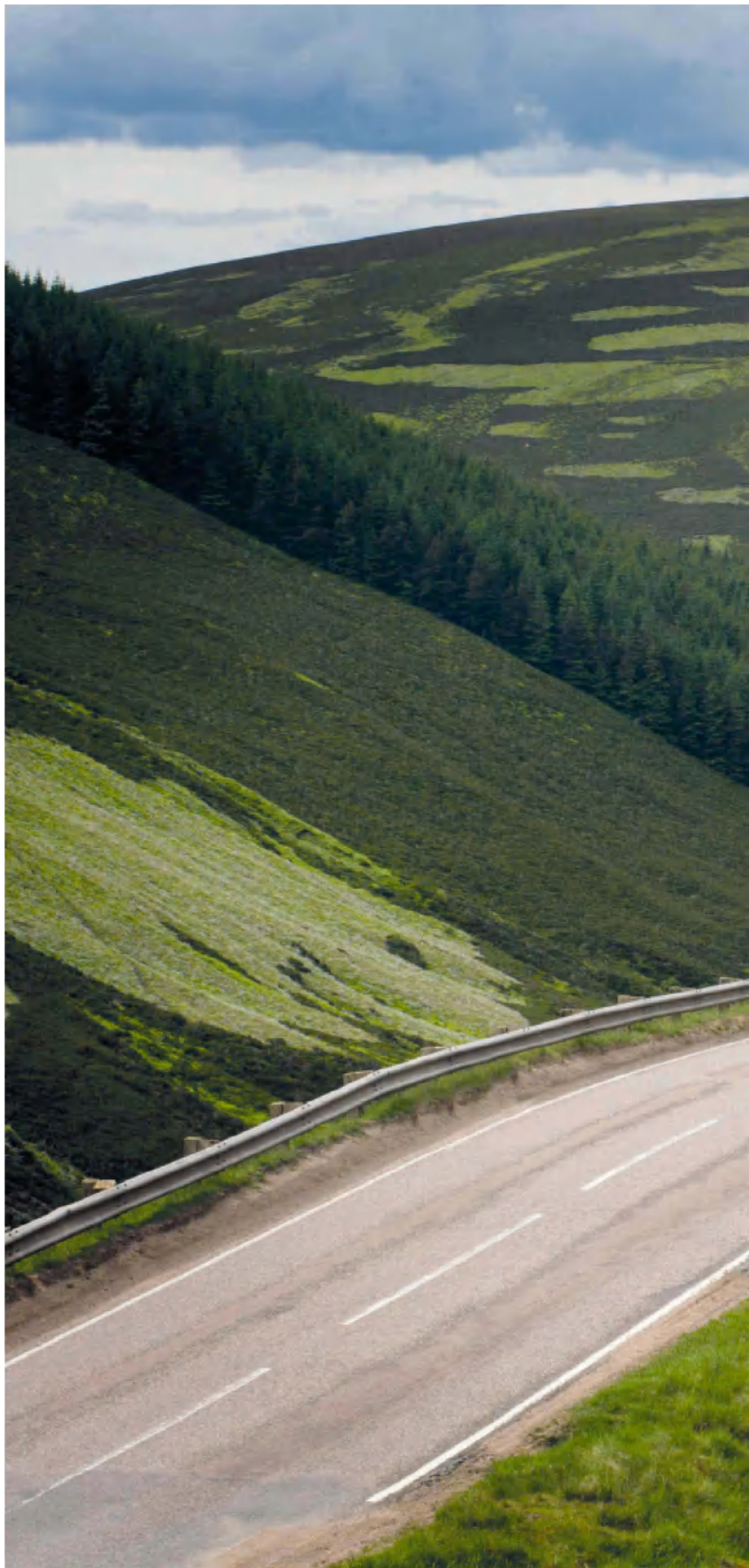
PENNY OF PAIN

Fresh from breaking the world record for cycling the length of Africa (6,718 miles in 41 days 10 hours and 22 minutes), Mark Beaumont has just taken on another challenge, but this time closer to home.

The Scottish adventurer rode the 100-mile route of the new sportive Etape Royale through Royal Deeside... on a penny-farthing. The ride included over 9,000 feet of climbing and raised funds for Mercy Corps Nepal earthquake appeal. With no gears and no effective braking on the downhills, it was a gruelling undertaking that soon acquired the hashtag #PennyOPain. The ride took 13 hours and 40 minutes.

Beaumont was riding with David Fox-Pitt, director of WildFox Events which is organising the Etape Royale. The sportive is based in Ballater, Aberdeenshire, and offers two routes, one of 65 and the other of 100 miles, both on closed roads.

More info: etaperoyale.com





STARTLINE

ON YOUR MARKS FOR A BRILLIANT MONTH IN THE OUTDOORS

A drink problem?

As summer temperatures soar (ahem!) a team of sport scientists is warning endurance athletes about the risk of over-hydrating

LONG DISTANCE RUNNERS, cyclists and triathletes should trust their thirst as a guide to how much fluid they need to drink, says an international panel of sport scientists. The 17 experts warn that advice to drink before you feel thirsty is only appropriate to a narrow set of circumstances, and that the dangers of drinking too much fluid are the principal cause of hyponatremia, a condition that can be serious and even fatal.

Working together, the scientists have produced a "consensus statement" on

hyponatremia, with the aim of launching an educational campaign to raise awareness of what they call "a preventable and treatable fluid imbalance."

Their conclusions are published in the *Clinical Journal of Sport Medicine*, and make essential reading for athletes involved in endurance events, from ultra-runners to Ironman triathletes and long distance cyclists. To understand the issue more deeply, here are 10 key findings from their statement:



1 What is exercise-associated hyponatremia (EAH)? It's a serum, plasma or blood sodium concentration below a normal reference range, for anything up to 24 hours after an event. For most laboratories, this is a sodium concentration of less than 135 mmol/L.

2 What causes EAH? It can result either from a loss of sodium and potassium; or a relative excess of total body water; or a combination of both. In most instances the single most important risk factor is a sustained, excessive intake of fluid. Whether water or sports drinks, this volume of fluid exceeds the amount of fluid lost through sweat, breath and urine, so that a positive fluid balance builds in the body. Athletes who finish events at the same weight or heavier than they were at the startline are at risk. As a rough guide, a marathon runner who loses less than 0.75kg during the course of a race is at risk of EAH.

3 How far do sodium levels have to dip? Falls of 7% to 10% in sodium levels within 24 hours can lead to EAH.

4 When does EAH develop? Research indicates hyponatremia comes on during and after endurance events. As a precaution, weigh yourself before and after training to assess your sweat rates and fluid replacement needs. Some weight loss will be due to energy expenditure, and this increases during longer and more intense exercise. If you have gained weight during training, it indicates that your fluid intake has been in excess of your fluid losses and that water overload is present.

5 What are the symptoms of EAH? Symptoms vary depending on the severity of the hyponatremia from mild light-headedness and nausea, to headache, vomiting, confusion and even seizure. However, many athletes finish endurance events with sodium



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KENTON
COOL

Heads for heights



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SCIENCE

Sort saddle sores



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COMP
WINNER

Sally Hall



levels depleted to the point where they are hyponatremic, but they experience no adverse symptoms. In a study of runners during the course of an ultramarathon, 67% were hyponatremic (asymptomatic) at some point during the race, but only 27% finished with sodium concentrations of below 135 mmol/L; 40% had self-corrected their sodium levels before the end of the race. Ironman triathletes also suffer from the condition, with up to 25% of competitors suffering from EAH.

6 Is it fatal? Complications associated with EAH have led to at least 14 athlete related deaths since 1981.

7 What types of event can lead to EAH? Military training exercises, marathons, Ironman triathlons and ultra-marathons are the most common causes of EAH, but it has also been diagnosed at training camps for rowers, after rugby league matches and

among long-distance cyclists. Slower finishers in both half marathons (2 to 3 hours) and sprint triathlons (2 hours) have also experienced EAH.

8 Will a sports drink solve the problem? The sodium in hypotonic sports drinks can stem the depletion of sodium from the body, but its concentrations in most drinks (10-38 mmol/L) is much lower than in blood (140 mmol/L). Consequently, excessive fluid intake tends to overwhelm the protective effect of the sodium content of drinks.

Excessive fluid intake tends to overwhelm the protective effect of the sodium content of drinks.

9 Who is most at risk? Smaller athletes and those who take longer to complete events are most at risk. Women have a higher incidence of EAH.

10 How do I avoid EAH? Drink less. "Thirst should provide adequate stimulus for preventing excess dehydration and markedly reduce the risk of developing EAH in all sports," say the experts in the *Clinical Journal of Sport Medicine*. Their consensus statement warns that advice to start drinking before you feel thirsty was intended for events that create high sweat rates where dehydration could evolve rapidly, but that this is a poor guide for lower sweat races. "Excessive fluid replacement beyond thirst (whether water, sports drinks or other hypotonic fluids) is not a panacea for all instances of fatigue, collapse, muscle cramping, or exertional heat stroke."

On the horizon

It's that exciting time of year when manufacturers start launching new product ranges. Here's a sneak preview of some of the hottest.

1 Nike Air Zoom Odyssey, £130

While Nike's perennially popular Pegasus running shoe moves into its 32nd iteration, here's a brand new shoe from the athletics giant. Zoom Air cushioning in the Odyssey delivers comfort and protection, while the foam midsole is designed to reduce pronation (rolling in of the foot) by supporting your foot throughout footstrike. It's targeted at fast-paced training runs, has a breathable mesh upper, and Nike's Flywire cables to hold the shoe snugly in place.

More info: nike.com

2 J.Laverack J.ACK, £2,250

If you found your eyes drawn to the T-shirt we featured a couple of months back featuring the equation " $x=n+1$ " (where x is bikes needed and n is bikes owned), then here's a magnificent looking bike to add to the sum of your bikes! It's a disc-equipped, titanium model from new firm J.Laverack, and it's designed for all-road riding, which means gravel tracks, cobbles and Tarmac. There's clearance for tyres of up to 32mm width, and the option of specifying mudguard and rack mounts, all of which make it the ideal winter steed or year-round ride for adventurers and tourers. The J.ACK is available as a frame only for £1,800; as a frameset including forks and Hope headset and bottom bracket for £2,250; or as a built bike with components specified by the customer.

More info: jlaverack.co.uk

3 Leki Micro Vario Carbon Antishock, £154.95

Take weight off your hips, knees and ankles and improve your stability with this super-light pair of carbon fibre walking poles. They fold into three so they're easily stored on a daysack; the ergonomic grip sits comfortably in the hand; and the anti-shock system avoids vibrations from rocky ground buzzing up your arms. On sale from March.

More info: leki.com

4 USN Protein Fuel 50, £25.13 for 6 x 500ml bottles

Boost your muscle recovery and add protein to your diet with this ready-made shake. Each 500ml bottle packs an impressive 50g of protein and 15g of carbs, yet is fat free and contains only 305kcal, making it a convenient way to help your body build lean muscle. It's available in three flavours, chocolate, strawberry and vanilla.

More info: usn.co.uk

5 Exped SynMat Hyperlite Duo, £tba

Maybe the Brits aren't romantic backpackers, because the sad news reaches *OF* Towers that this double-width sleep mat won't be for sale in this country. So you'll have to find an online retailer overseas if you want to snuggle up to your hiking or adventure-racing partner. The insulated mat should save space and weight compared to two single mats, and more importantly will avoid any cold, awkward gaps between sleep mats (unless of course you've fallen out with your beloved, in which case it could be even colder and more awkward!).

More info: exped.com

6 Royal British Legion running T, £19.99

Run with a poppy on your chest, showing your support for the Royal British Legion, in this technical T-shirt that proudly displays the Legion's new slogan "Live On". It's available in men's and women's sizes, and there's also a running vest and cycling jersey in the range too. All funds from sales go directly to the Royal British Legion to support all its work caring for members of the British Armed Forces, past and present, and their families.

More info: poppyshop.org.uk

7 Raidlight Responsiv 8L, £124.99

A clever combination of vest and backpack made the vest-shaped Responsiv a winner at the prestigious Outdoor Industry awards. Carry your water bottles in the shoulder harness pockets, and other race and training essentials in the back. The entire pack only weighs 160g.

More info: firstascentoutdoordistribution.co.uk

8 Shimano MW7, £159.99

Apologies if autumn and winter still seem a long way off, but it's never too early to be prepared, and these new waterproof, insulated mountain biking boots will get you through the next couple of seasons. They're a new addition to Shimano's off-road shoe line-up and feature a fleece-lined insole for warmth and a Gore-Tex liner for waterproofing.

The MW7 is aimed at trail and enduro riding, with rubber studs on the outside of the sole units for grip, appropriate holes for SPD pedals and moulded toe cap and ankle support.

More info: madison.co.uk





5 things we learnt from Kenton Cool, mountaineer

The mountaineer has climbed Everest eleven times, including twice in one week, and is recognised as one of the best climbers of his generation.

KENTON COOL HAS made a telephone call and tweeted from the top of Everest, and to mark the sixtieth anniversary of the first ascent of the world's highest mountain in 2013, he climbed Everest, Nuptse and Lhotse in a single expedition, gaining and losing 10km in altitude in just 120 hours and spending dangerous hours in the low-oxygen "Death Zone". The effort required so much energy he returned two-stone lighter. Yet his first mountain summit was in Wales, his first rock climb in Dorset, and 20 years ago a fall shattered both his ankles. He was told he'd never walk again, and still carries a limp, but he's gone on to become a hero of high places.

1 "A new line is what it's all about, first ascents; there's so much still to do in the climbing world. It's a very rich hunting ground for adventure. As a climber, I get drawn to these strong, bold lines. The legendary climber Riccardo Cassin once famously said that if he were to drop a water droplet from the summit, the line that it would take would be the line that he wanted to climb."

2 "The first mountain I climbed was a tiny hill in North Wales called Moel Siabod and I was 14 or 15, and it rained all the way up. I was wearing cotton tracksuit bottoms and they were down by my knees! We were all boy scouts at the time, stood on the top in this low mist, not being able to see anything but finding it totally exhilarating. My first rock climb was a day of abject terror at Swanage in Dorset. The fact I came home alive was a triumph, it was utterly terrifying."

3 "I love climbing in the Scottish Highlands, certainly in winter, and North Wales has some of the best climbing in the world. But the Himalayas are where my passion lies, and I love exploring there."

4 "I have been known to cut all the tags out of my clothing to save weight, yet I sneak in my teddy bear called Stripey, a yellow and green mouse that I've had all my life. It's completely foolish because it must weigh a few hundred grammes. One of the reasons I take him is because no matter how bad a situation is, when I'm snuggled in my sleeping bag and close my eyes, I can pretend to be almost anywhere else in the world other than where I am good if it's all gone pear shaped."

5 "In my 11 climbs of Everest I have never stood on the true summit. The true summit is actually very small, and drops steeply on all sides; it's only about the size of a breakfast tray. I have touched it, but I have never stood on it. I don't want to conquer Everest. You can stand on the top but she won't submit to you even if you did."



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by Kenton Cool is out now,
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Sort saddle sores



Pain in private places is rarely discussed, but trying to ignore saddle sores can have serious consequences.

Symptoms of saddle soreness range from bruises to blisters to boils, and all demand treatment. They're caused through skin abrasions and irritation to skin follicles, and exacerbated by the hot, sweaty conditions inside your cycling shorts, where bacteria can thrive.

One danger is that in an effort to alleviate the pain, a rider adopts a different riding position, leaning to the left or right to lift pain off the sore.

"If you continue to ride, compensating for something like a saddle sore and placing excess pressure on another part of the body that it isn't used to it could result in a muscular imbalance and injury," warns Matt Rabin, team chiropractor for the Cannondale-Garmin Pro Cycling Team.

He advises riders to:

- 1 Get out of dirty cycling shorts the moment you finish your ride and change into something else. Wash your kit as soon as possible.
- 2 Clean, dry and apply antiseptic cream to a saddle sore as soon as you notice it.
- 3 Take a break and stop riding for a couple of days to give the sore a chance to settle.

The Pain Free Cyclist by Matt Rabin and Robert Hicks, £16.99, bloomsbury.com

Protein powers performance

Taking a protein supplement accelerates the recovery times of runners after training, according to new research.

Sport scientists in Denmark and Norway followed a group of 18 orienteers at a training camp, fuelling half with whey protein hydrolysate (0.3g per kilo of bodyweight) before an exercise session and a protein-carb mix afterwards (0.3g protein and 1g carb per kilo of bodyweight); the other half were given pure carbohydrate drinks (1g carb per kilo of bodyweight) before and after training.

On the last day of the training camp, the orienteers did a 4km run-test, and only the protein-carb group improved their performance. During questioning, the protein and carb-powered runners also had a more positive sense of their performance capacity prior to the test.

"Ingestion of whey protein hydrolysate before and after each exercise session improves performance and reduces markers of muscle damage during a strenuous 1-week training camp," said the researchers in the *International Journal of Sports Nutrition and Exercise Metabolism*. "The results indicate that protein supplementation in conjunction with each exercise session facilitates the recovery from strenuous training."

Pictures Shutterstock

Don't double up on carbs

Fuelling a ride is vital to avoid the bonk, the dreaded energy crash, but there's a limit to how much carbohydrate the body can absorb.

SCIENTISTS IN THE Department of Sports Studies at the University of Stirling measured the impact of cyclists consuming either water, or one of three sports drinks containing 20, 39 or 64g carbohydrate in a series of tests.

The riders, each of whom have trained for more than six hours per week for more than three years had to ride for two hours at 95% of their lactate threshold, and then undertake a 30-minute time trial at 70% of their peak power output.

Drinking 20g of carbs per hour delivered no appreciable gain over water, but both the higher-carb drinks led to significantly faster time trials, reducing the time by 6.1% (39g per hour) and 6.5% (64g per hour).

Consuming 39 and 64g per hour of carbohydrate, "...were similarly effective at improving endurance cycling performance compared with a 0g/hour control in our trained cyclists..." report the researchers in the *International Journal of Sport Nutrition and Exercise Metabolism*.





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Summit for the weekend

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Why: Few places can pack in as much outdoor adventure in as little space as Symonds Yat. Straddling the River Wye, this outdoor playground offers canoeing and kayaking on the river, climbing on steep limestone cliffs, walking, a tough road cycle hill climb, and miles of mountain biking in the neighbouring Forest of Dean. The viewpoint from the top is one of the finest in the entire Wye Valley, particularly when autumn colours sweep across the forest.

Canoe here: Whether you head upstream or down, for half a day or a long weekend, canoeing and kayaking along the River Wye is a fabulous experience. The river is wide and generally calm, although about a mile downstream of Symonds Yat there is a brief stretch of Grade 2 rapids. You can hire a two-person Canadian canoe in Symonds Yat for £35.00 from, riverwyecanoehire.com

Climb here: The limestone gorge at Symonds Yat makes for one of the most scenic climbing destinations in the country, and with more than 400 routes ranging from 10m to 30m, including a pinnacle, there's huge variety. If you're new to climbing, sign up with a group and instructor at we-pursuits.co.uk. For those who prefer the low life to the high life, there's also an extensive cave network to explore for potholers.

Run here: Broad tracks, thick forest and steep inclines make this a potential trail running heaven. If you don't want to carry a map, just follow one of the waymarked walking routes that pass by Symonds Yat – the Highmeadow Trail has 8 and 11-mile circular options, or link the waymarked

Campsite Trail with the Campsite cycle link for a 5.5-mile route – see tinyurl.com/okh3jc2

Cycle here: Get ready to sweat and struggle on the tough climb to the top of Symonds Yat, with the gradient touching 17 percent in places and 20 percent near the top. It's one of the highlights of both the Forest of Dean Classic sportive and the Wiggle Wye Valley Warrior, both of which take place in May – see wheelsinwheels.com and ukcyclingevents.co.uk

Mountain bike here: There are fire trails and tracks through the woods around Symonds Yat, but it's such a popular walking destination that mountain bikers are better advised to take advantage of the first class trails in the nearby Forest of Dean. Our choice? The 7-mile blue and red graded Verderers' Trail, ideal for intermediate and experienced bikers, tinyurl.com/ptgblvs

Maps: Navigate your way around with Ordnance Survey Explorer OL14, Wye valley & Forest of Dean, or Landranger 162 Gloucester and Forest of Dean.

Stay here: Cheap sleeps can be found at YHA Wye Valley, close to Symonds Yat, where beds cost from £15 per night, yha.org.uk. Camping at Doward Park in Symonds Yat West costs from £14 per pitch for two people, dowardpark.co.uk. For your own room with a solid roof, try Garth Cottage, B&B from £35pp/pn for two-night stays, garthcottage-symondsyat.com, or the Saracen's Head Inn, where double rooms cost from £85 per night B&B. saracenhedinn.co.uk

The viewpoint from the top is one of the finest in the entire Wye Valley, particularly when autumn colours sweep across the forest.

Spring all year round...



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Events Diary: Sept - Oct

There's something for everyone in our events guide...



5TH SEPTEMBER

MAN VS MOUNTAIN

Caernarfon, Gwynedd

Run from sea to the summit of Snowdon and back down again to face a series of gruelling challenges. This is a tough off-road event. You'll cover more than 20 miles of off-road terrain, feel the muscle-burning ascent of Snowdon and face the savage Vertical Kilometre challenge, the abseil and a selection of deep water obstacles.

Waiting list places available, ratraceman@vsmountain.com

5TH SEPTEMBER

SHOREHAM WOODS 10K TRAIL RUN

Shoreham Woods, Kent
Follow a scenic off-road route on this trail race through handsome Shoreham Woods. It's a challenging course, so PBs are unlikely.
£20, pbraceevents.co.uk

6TH SEPTEMBER

PARAS' 10 OCR

Catterick Garrison, North Yorkshire

A 10-mile endurance run following the same route as the Parachute Regiment selection march, with the option to

carry a 35lb bergen rucksack and wear trousers and military boots.
£35, paras10.com

7TH SEPTEMBER

BRITISH GAS SWIM BRITAIN

Blenheim Palace, Oxfordshire

One of a series of events that takes place in late-summer and early autumn, designed to get Britain swimming. This one's an open-water event. You'll get the chance to swim with world champion Keri-Anne Payne.
£tbc, swimbritain.co.uk

12-13TH SEPTEMBER

SCOTLAND COAST TO COAST

Nairn, Highlands

Traverse the Highlands by foot, bike and kayak.
£200 to £295, scotlandcoasttocoast.com

19TH SEPTEMBER

THE PUSH

Bavelaw Castle, Edinburgh

Formerly known as the Great Pentlands Push this is a cross-country run or trek around the beautiful Pentland Hills on courses of 12, 18 or 25 miles. All in aid of an essential rebuild

of St Columba's Hospice.
£75, greatpentlandspush.com

19TH SEPTEMBER

HARDMOORS 60

Guisborough, North Yorkshire

Run 62 miles from Guisborough to Filey along the Cleveland Coast. You've an 18-hour cut off.
£50-£55, hardmoors110.org.uk

20TH SEPTEMBER

TOUR DE MOOR SPORTIVE

Cleator Moor, Cumbria

A short, end of season 31-mile ride through the Lake District.
£10, westcoastchallenge.net

21ST SEPTEMBER

ISLE OF BUTE SWIM

Argyll and Bute

Swim 2km in open water in the autumnal beauty of the Firth of Clyde.
£tbc, vigourevents.com

4TH OCTOBER

GLENCOE GATHERING

Run 10km, a half or full marathon. The latter takes in the gruelling 500-metre climb over the Devil's Staircase.
£20/10km, £40/half, £50/marathon, glencoemarathon.co.uk



STAR EVENTS NEAR & FAR

Sign up & start training for these epic events

»NEAR HORIZON

25-27TH SEPTEMBER ALPKIT BIG SHAKEOUT

Bakewell, Derbyshire

Now in its fifth year, this popular Peak District outdoor festival includes the opportunity for world class rock-climbing, challenging mountain biking, great walking, wild swimming and caving; plus lectures, live music, adventure films and camping.
£60 for the weekend, alpkit.com

»DISTANT HORIZON

17TH OCTOBER COLOSSUS RIDE Falmouth, Cornwall

Only the fittest and bravest should contemplate this epic sportive ride from Pendennis Point, Falmouth, to Admiralty, London, nearly 500km retracing the route travelled by the courier who brought news of Nelson's victory at Trafalgar back to the capital. You've got 24 hours to complete it – as part of a relay team.
£300, ridethetrafalgarway.com

»DISTANT HORIZON

31ST OCTOBER RAIL TO TRAIL Newport, Essex

The first in a series of four trail runs, each within an hour of London by train. Each event offers 10km, half marathon and marathon distance races, all off-road on footpaths, bridleways and farm tracks.
From £29.50, trailscape.co.uk

»LIFELIST HORIZON

TBC CHALLENGE ROTH Roth, Germany

The world's biggest long-distance triathlon sells out within hours, and no wonder. With a quarter of a million spectators, plus 3,500 athletes from more than 60 countries, this is a complete triathlon festival – just remember that 3.8km of swimming, 180km of cycling and a 42km run stand between you and the finish line!
challenge-roth.com

(Download our Complete 2015 Event's Guide at: outdoorfitnessmag.com)

6TH TO 13TH NOVEMBER

OMAN DESERT MARATHON

ANYONE FASCINATED BY isolation and otherworldly landscapes, and seeking a real endurance challenge, should consider participating in the Oman Desert Marathon – a 165km run divided into six stages (21km, 22km, 25km, 27km, 40km and 30km). This is an ideal event both for less experienced runners and top runners training for even more extreme contests.

Embracing the experience of an authentic desert existence, competitors are completely self-sufficient, carrying all of their

own equipment except for water and sleeping bags.

The Oman Desert is mind-blowingly beautiful. Following ancient camel caravan routes (used for centuries by traders), runners venture deep into the desert, crossing an oasis and canyons, and scaling towering red dunes. The longest leg of the race, the night stage, immerses runners in the magic of the desert illuminated by stars.

Highly professional organisation of the event ensures maximum safety for every entrant.

Monitoring occurs from a decent enough distance so as not to spoil the sense of desert desolation, but close enough to keep everyone on track and to provide rapid attention if necessary.

There are free places for those who raise £2,500 to restore damaged faces and lives.

All UK competitors run on behalf of Facing Africa, a charity which funds two surgical teams of highly skilled and experienced individual volunteers to visit Ethiopia each year to perform complex facial reconstructive surgery on those

whose faces have been grossly disfigured by the disease Noma.

The cost of running the Oman Desert Marathon is £840 including all accommodation in Oman, all meals before and after the race, drinks and transfers. (Flights can be arranged at extra cost from £429 return). However, all competitors who raise a minimum of £2,500 (excluding Gift Aid) in donations for Facing Africa will immediately be refunded the £840 fee.

More info marathonoman.com or call 01672 500555



Sally Hall MTB Competition Winner

Outdoor Fitness teamed up with the SCOTT MTB MARATHON SERIES, SCOTT Sports, CYCLE-TEC and TORQ Fitness Consultancy, to offer one of our readers the ultimate mountain biking prize. We're now following our winner Sally Hall as she trains and races through this summer's Scott MTB marathon series.

Pictures Rob Barker

IT'S ALL GONE south - geographically speaking - as the Scott MTB Marathon Series headed to Wantage, Oxfordshire. Round 4 seemed to go down pretty well if the feedback and volume of riders was anything to go by. The penultimate event in the series could even be seen as a standalone round due to the much reduced elevation gain, and reduced technical difficulty. The distances ranged from 25km to 100km and this gave everyone the opportunity to have a go, which is fantastic. I think the quote that follows from MTB Marathon organiser Gareth Rowland (director of Cycle-Tec) sums it up nicely:

"Round 4 is the most successful marathon to date! The town of Wantage welcomed us with open arms, as did the farmers and other trail users. Almost 800 riders tackled the multiple distances with the youngest just five years old and the oldest 70 plus and there were even a couple of Olympians and a British champ thrown in for good measure."

I don't think I can say much more, but well done to the team for another well-organised and successful event.

My round 4 efforts then... Round 4 was close to the family abode and this gave me a good reason to take a few days off prior to the ride, chill out, eat too much good food (carb loading???), walk the much loved dog in the forest, and play hide and seek with my nephew, good times! Prior to this I had been sticking fairly well to my set training plan whatever the weather. I find it's easier to ride in the rain when you're already out - it's a lot harder to go out when it's already torrential. My neighbour thinks it's highly amusing when I come back and hose the bike down and then turn it on myself! I've been using the training time to discover new routes on- and off-road, which I then adapt and use for the women's rides that I run. A couple of the local mountain bike trails have been great although I think I need some practice on slippery routes and jumps. Let's just say my legs for the weeks after showed the effects of falling off and being bashed by my bike - thankfully nothing too serious. I've tried to keep it to a nice mix of road and mountain, as I always fear I may lose enthusiasm if I just stick to one discipline. That's why I love biking so much it's just so versatile!

Race day was a beautiful, sunny day - the least you would expect for coming further south. If it had been raining the ride would have been a different experience that may not have been as enjoyable, but thankfully it was all sunshine and smiles. It was a very different style of course to the previous ones due to the nature of the location, but that's not to be sniffed at - it doesn't make a course any easier. Actually in my case it felt a lot harder because of the quickened pace and amount of pedalling required. At least with the previous rounds with big climbs you get a well-deserved break on the other side. Here it was just a continuous beasting with no real let up until you got a couple of minutes rest at the feed station to top up with much needed supplies.

There was a slightly delayed start as a few riders got caught out by the Ride London traffic, but once the horn sounded we were off to take on as much of the Ridgeway as they race organisers could fit in. I decided to do the 100km Monster

Marathon with the reasoning being that if it was flatter it would be easier. I now beg to differ! It could have been easy if I had gone at a nice relaxed pace all the way round, but that would have added a few more hours to the time. I started by just going with the flow and finding places to pass riders, which is tricky when you're all going round on the only little fast track. If you deviate you have to work a whole lot harder over the grass to get past. However, it didn't take that long for the riders to spread out, as there weren't the technical descents to navigate, all just kept pedalling and fitness became the definitive factor.

This round I decided to go without a rucksack, I used a little saddle-bag for tools (thankfully no mechanicals) and filled my jersey pockets with gels and bars and just had the one 750ml bottle. I'm not sure now if this was a bright idea on probably the hottest round thus far. Just like on all the others I didn't seem to drink much up until the first feed station, maybe it's because I hydrated beforehand. I'm not sure, but I didn't stop at the first feed station at about 15 km in.

To be honest I couldn't highlight certain course sections as they were all very similar - although there was a little comedy loop in a small wood that took you off the main track, navigated you around a few trees and spat you back out on the main track. A couple of riders and myself thought they did it just for the hell of it, to make the distance up - a little pointless perhaps, but never mind. As the many fields passed and the terrain changed from grass to gravel, riders passed by or I passed them. A tractor kindly reversed back up a hill with a trailer (quite a skill) to let a few of us pass though. The views were lovely, although I didn't get too many opportunities to appreciate them, as you still need to concentrate on the track in front. By the Monster cut off I tagged on with a couple of other riders, which really helped to keep me going and maintain speed. It was very tempting to just sit up and slow down, but having the other riders around really spurred me on - it was great.

I really enjoyed the Wantage route although if I'm honest I think I enjoy the hilly and techy side of riding more, as that keeps me more engaged. Over all I managed an average pace of 12.7mph and finished in a time of 4 hours 51 minutes. I was happy with that, as I didn't set any goal or knew what kind of pace to ride at over this type of course or distance. When I finished I was the most exhausted I had felt after all the rides - maybe I was slightly dehydrated too as that one 750ml bottle was "enough" to get me round. I was spent!

I can safely say that without the specific training plan I was set, that although I may have completed Wantage I wouldn't have done it at that speed. It's the furthest continuous ride I've ever done to date, so it's a pretty good personal achievement.

There's now only one more round to go (Ruthin, North Wales), so I decided in all my wisdom to enter the Gorricks Torq In Your Sleep, 12-hour solo to fill the gap. I have done it before with no training, so together with the training plan I'm following, and what I've done so far, I should now be in a really good place to tackle it. As noted round 4, did leave me a bit run down, but hopefully with a couple extra rest days I'll be up and raring to go. And then I look forward to really giving my all in round 5 of the marathon series in Ruthin.

■ Follow my MTB journey on twitter @Tea_and_Sally





SCOTT MTB MARATHON SERIES

12-13th Sep

Ruhtin, north-Wales

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“Fancy a once in a lifetime challenge?” This is how expedition organiser and director of Sandbaggers Ltd David Scott put it in an email to Scottish ultrarunning stars Donnie Campbell and Andrew Murray adding, “Run across the Namib Desert – some parts have not even been explored properly. Here are some photos. Sore feet and adventure await.”

S

cott was right. Four months later, in February this year – after an epic nine-day adventure from Ludritz to Walvis Bay – Campbell and Murray became the first to run

more than 500km across the world's harshest desert, home to the world's highest sand dunes. The area is not only uninhabited, but nobody had driven the first half of the route ... ever.

Preparation and perseverance were two of the factors crucial to their success. For example, Campbell told *Outdoor Fitness* how much it took to prepare for the expedition: “I logged more than 30 hours training a week in the November, December and January of a bleak Scottish winter, often completing speed sessions with my body shaking and nauseous because I'd pushed myself almost to breaking point.” Murray, who had clocked up 130 training miles/week, was soon drawing on his reserves of perseverance after a literally “blistering” start to the expedition: “Getting a nasty blister on day one meant that from day two it felt like I was constantly running with a stone in my shoe, and I

couldn't run for three weeks when I got home.”

Planning was a third ingredient in the mix. David Scott – Chairman of the National Adventure Awards and Honorary Consul of Mongolia in Scotland – said: “Remoteness plus lack of rain and running water made the Namib 550 expedition a testing logistical endeavour. We were supported by Scottish business leader Bert Jukes of LittleBigShot and Lyprinol, to whom we're indebted.”

Day one not only saw the arrival of Murray's award-winning blister; the support vehicles got stuck in sand. Campbell recalls: “Andrew and I carried on towards the mountains, thinking they would catch us up. After over an hour of running without water or food there was no sign of the support vehicles and the temperature was rising. This spelled trouble! We climbed onto high ground to try and spot the crew, and after twenty minutes the lead vehicle appeared. It could have turned out much worse, and it was a lesson learned. We then ran on into diamond mine territory where no one had been before.”

“Day two,” said Murray “was a long shift wading through heavy sand for 62km, ending high in a dune system with a view of the sea and

B 5 5 0





abandoned mining quarters. I should have been elated, but I wasn't. My 'tank' felt emptier than it should have done; my hip flexor was tight, and my big toe was one big blister. Another eight days seemed impossible."

Yet Murray was philosophical: "A challenge must have an element of danger and a chance of failure. In 2013 I tried – and failed – to run from the Andes to the Amazon in a day, but the next year Donnie and I ran the UK's ten highest peaks in a day. Some you win, and some you learn. All I could do was do the right things consistently, and expect things to improve."

Murray's expectations were tested on day three, when they entered the cauldron of the Devil's Work Shop, with 400-metre sand dunes and temperatures soaring into the high 30s Centigrade. Campbell says: "It was brutal, climbing these massive dunes. If you got lost you could die, so we had to stay focused and keep our support vehicles in sight at all times."

Anyone contemplating such a challenge should have reliable support, as Murray told *Outdoor Fitness*: "The first three days proved we could be confident in our support crew. Their route-finding was superb and we were well-stocked with food, sun cream and anything we could ever want." Scott adds: "To keep Donnie and Andrew safe, fed, watered and moving in the right direction I had a nine-man team – including local knowledge provided by Live The Journey guides – five vehicles, over a ton of water, a similar amount of fuel and cases of medical and safety equipment. We also had a helicopter standing by in case of emergency but fortunately had no cause to call it in."

As far as their daily running commitment was concerned, Murray said: "We probably needed to conserve more energy by covering good distance, but running slower; and we didn't need to think too far ahead. Breaking the challenge down 10km by 10km, and day by day kept down anxiety about the scale of the challenge; and I recommend that anyone contemplating an ultra should break it down into bite-sized chunks."

Day four found the adventurers surrounded by dunes, as Campbell explains: "Valleys were the theme of the day as we made our way back to the coast, with towering sand dunes either side. Occasionally crossing the dunes into another valley, we eventually reached the coast to find the most spectacular campsite and a colony of fur seals." By now, Murray's thoughts on sand were sharpening: "Every thing in the Namib Desert is heavy sand. In the Gobi Challenge, the Sahara Race, and Marathon des Sables, at least half of the course is usually runnable hard sand, or rocky terrain; this wasn't. However, after a few days our

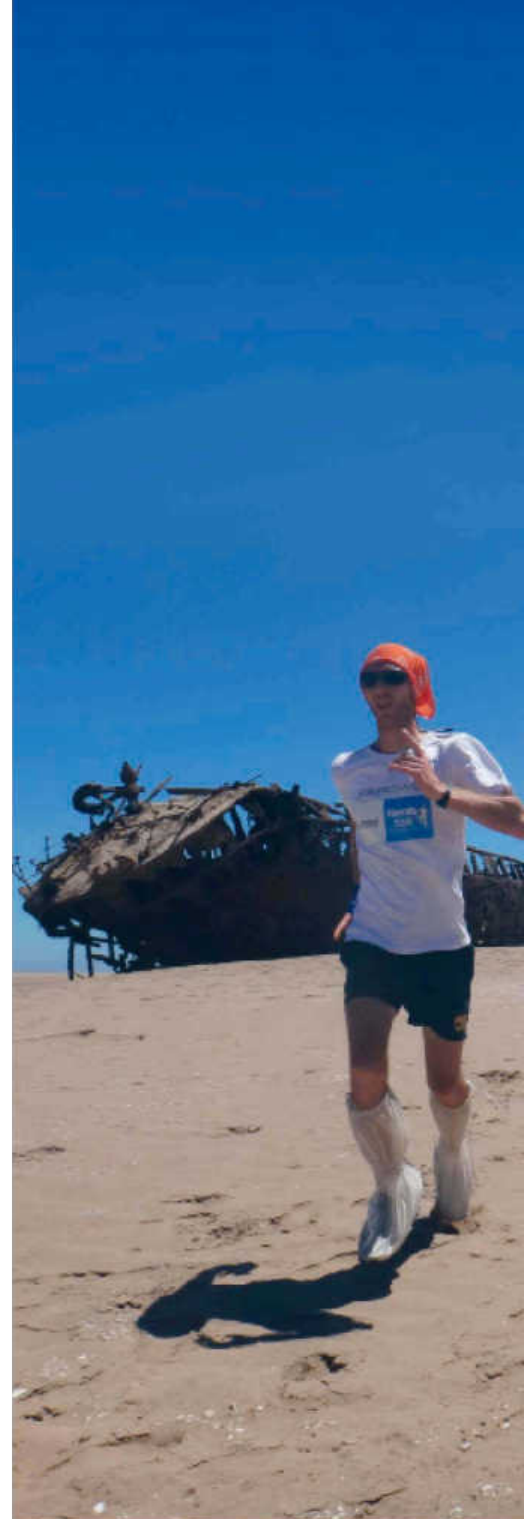
bodies were settling into it, and we knew that the second half of the challenge would feature some beach that was easier than dunes. I felt after day four we had a fifty/fifty chance of getting it done."

The next few days found them running along the desert coast – with its own challenges, as Campbell remembers: "Beach running didn't help our battered bodies. Running on a camber puts a lot of stress on certain parts of your body. On day five Andrew and I ran the first 35km ourselves as the support vehicles couldn't get around the towering sand dunes rising straight out from the sea. I think this was the most difficult day for Andrew; his back was troubling him." Murray says: "Donnie had sand in his eyes, and my back seized up leading to an uncomfortable time at the end of day five, I was unable to move for half an hour. But we were getting there, and thanks to the expert route-finding of our Namibia hosts we thought we could emerge from the desert a day early, on day nine rather than ten."

The finish at Walvis Bay was coming closer, and Campbell was restless: "After running along a beach for four days I was sick of sand and couldn't wait to be out of the desert." Andrew too was anticipating journey's end: "We ran over salt flats, dunes and the coast on day eight." Flamingos, perhaps sensing the occasion, began to greet them, although, Murray recalls, "... on another occasion we were hemmed in by 300kgs of Oryx, a huge antelope with massive straight horns. They can kill lions. On day nine, we tanked the last leg into civilisation. Apart from our tight-knit group, we had seen no humans in the desert, so being welcomed to Walvis Bay by Chief Kooitjee and members of the local Topnaar tribe was special."

Meeting the Topnaar tribe representatives was just as important to Campbell and Murray as their epic run. Murray says: "We now had the chance to share vital medical supplies donated by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow; shoes and athletic equipment donated by Merrell UK and cycling enthusiasts; and other gifts from Bert Jukes and his team. Chief Kooitjee, the local medical team; the Mayor of Walvis Bay; and the divisional Health Minister shared pearls of wisdom, and told us of the challenges they face. This is the start of a relationship which, with the support of many in Namibia and back home, can achieve lasting change."

So what was the hardest bit? Campbell is clear: "I've been asked this many times. The honest answer is the training I did in Scotland before we left. I always push myself to the limits in training and I remember John Ngugi – five times World Cross-Country Champion and 1988 Olympic 5000m Champion – telling me that the key to his success was to 'Train Hard - Fight Easy'."





MEET THE GUYS

DR ANDREW MURRAY

Team Merrell UK, Merrell Brand Ambassador, SportScotland Institute of Sport, Clinical Fellow at Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow, ultrarunner, general practitioner and sports medicine doctor.

1999: Struggled to finish a 10km run in Inverness.

2011: Ran 2,659 miles from John O'Groats to the Sahara in 78 days.

2012: Ran seven marathons on seven continents in seven days. Began a six-month secondment to the Scottish Government as its Physical Activity Champion: "My main aim is to spread the message that one's quality of life benefits hugely from physical activity, not only conferring distinct physiological advantages, but boosting wellbeing too. I'm not encouraging everyone to become an ultrarunner but I'm encouraging everyone to become more physically active."

2013: Andrew and Donnie ran up and down the 5,895m Mt Kilimanjaro in one day

DONNIE CAMPBELL

Running coach, ex-Royal Marine Commando and founder of getactiverunning.com.

Donnie is sponsored by UVU, Footworks, Out.Run, osteopath Daniel Gerber and Sandbaggers Ltd.

2008: Weighed 17-stone when he began running

2011: Ran 184 miles – without stopping – from Glasgow to Isle of Skye in 44 hours

2012: Won the Run From The Hills 21.5km trail race (Australia)

2013: Scottish 100km champion

2014: Donnie and Andrew were the first to run the Big Ten – the UK's ten highest peaks – in less than 24 hours

2015: Won the Iznik 136km ultra (Turkey)

He says: "When it comes to training, nobody really cares if you get up at 5am to fit in a training run, or how hard you pushed yourself in a speed session, but when it comes to a challenge or race then people are watching and expecting a performance."

DR ANDREW MURRAY'S TOP TIPS FOR DESERT RUNNING

Footwear Feet swell in the desert. I use a pair of shoes half a size bigger than usual.

Sandgaiters They help stop sand getting in your shoes and causing blisters. I use "Sandbaggers Gaiters" made with parachute silk. Stitch them into your shoes rather than gluing – glue melts in the heat.

Clothing Wear lightweight, moisture-wicking clothing – including socks.

Sunscreen Use high-factor sunscreen that stays where it is when you sweat and only needs application once or twice daily. I use P20.

Blister kit Eighty five percent of competing ultrarunners get blisters,

and this will increase in the desert. Use Sterets to clean the skin and some sterile needles for popping blisters. Pop at the lowest point, squeeze out fluid, and leave to dry until morning. Next morning, cover with zinc oxide tape.

Medical kit Paracetamol – two tablets, four times a day – is good for pain. Non-steroidal anti-inflammatories like Brufen and Voltarol should be avoided for endurance running. Immodium/loperamide is helpful in case of D&V.

Take Vaseline; hand sanitizer gel; and toilet paper. Drink bottled water and avoid dodgy food. Ear plugs help you sleep during flights and in noisy tents.

"In a single weekend it's possible to hike alongside all of the principal highlights of the Wall, through the most dramatic landscape, with a perfectly placed mid-way camp..."

WALKING

Challenge, history and dramatic landscapes abound on a 48-hour mission to walk the highlights of Hadrian's Wall.

Words

Jonathan Manning

Pictures

Visit Britain, Jonathan Manning,
Nick Teesdale

H

a long way."

Depending how you measure these things, we've walked for a weekend, for 30 miles or through 900 years of history. The driver is right about one thing though, it does feel like a very long way, and staying on the bus to reach a stop that's a couple of hundred yards closer to our car feels like a luxury.

Hang on a moment, lads, says the kindly driver of the wittily numbered AD122 bus as we arrive in Hexham. "I can drop you closer to your car. Looks like you've walked

We had parked there yesterday morning before catching a westward-bound train to Brampton, from where we backpacked our way eastwards along Hadrian's Wall to Chollerford. It feels a bit like cheating to have caught the bus back to our car, but after two punishing days on our feet we clamber eagerly onto the cheery, yellow bus, numbered in tribute to the year in which Emperor Hadrian had ordered the construction of a wall to control the northern frontier of the mighty Roman empire.

The entire course of Hadrian's Wall Path stretches 84 miles from Bowness-on-Solway in Cumbria to Wallsend in Newcastle-upon-



THE WALL

Tyne. As a masonry structure, however, visible remnants of Hadrian's Wall are restricted to a line between Walton in Cumbria, and Chollerford. To the east and west of these bookends, the route continues to their respective coasts.

While this may be disappointing for an archaeologist, from a backpacking perspective it's fabulous. In a single weekend it's possible to hike alongside all of the principal highlights of the Wall, through the most dramatic landscape, with a perfectly placed mid-way camp below Winshield Crags, the highest point on the whole national trail.

And so it is that my friend Nick and I find ourselves beetling cross-country on the train to Brampton, trying not to peer out of the window in order to maintain as much surprise as possible in the landscape we're about to cross. Full of anticipation, I'm tempted to extend our tickets to Carlisle and walk more of the course of the Wall – in the back of my mind there's a nagging doubt that we're about to experience the equivalent of *Match of the Day* highlights of Hadrian's Wall, rather than appreciate the whole thing, but our time is tight, our packs are heavy, and after a four-hour drive to Hexham we just want to start walking.

Slinging our packs over our shoulders at Brampton Station, a steady three-mile climb to the Wall gives us the chance to fine-tune the straps and waist belts on our rucksacks before we reach the trail. On the way we pass beautiful Lanercost Priory, constructed with stones pilfered from the Wall, and as the walk progresses building after building and barn after barn seem to harbour guilty secrets that their walls were originally part of a structure created by the Roman Empire.

The first stones we come across lying as Hadrian intended are more than a mile down the national trail at Hare Hill, including one stone etched with the three-letter inscription



SPP, the calling card of the centurion who laid it. Sadly, it turns out that this is actually a 19th century reconstruction of the wall, using stones garnered from elsewhere.

To the untrained eye (i.e. ours), there's little to suggest Roman influence in these early miles as we stride along a whisper-quiet road, through the whitewashed village of Banks and on towards Birdoswald. Even when I later investigate the route on Google Earth, there's no obvious sign of the Wall and its accompanying earthworks, although it's quite possible that a road now runs directly above the course of the original fortification.

This raises one of the great fascinations that Hadrian's Wall holds for me – the moment when it stopped being a quarry of ready-cut stone for local construction projects and became a revered historic monument. Although an exact answer is hard to establish, it was in 1830s that John Clayton, a Newcastle lawyer and town clerk, started buying the land on which the Wall stood in order to protect the monument. The best surviving stretches are a tribute to his foresight.

Truth be told though, neither Nick nor I are here as fans of *Time Team*. This weekend is a golden chance for two days backpacking through a rugged landscape, with the Wall a handrail to guide us through moor and rough uplands. The only time we glimpse at a map is to calculate how far we have left to walk, rather than for navigation purposes.

Freed from the complications of having to

find our way, we can keep our eyes on the horizon and the Jekyll and Hyde landscapes split by Hadrian's men. To the north lies coarse ground, rough grazing on boggy soil with few features and a barren emptiness. When the clouds descend, as they do frequently, it all looks wild and forbidding; the ladder stiles over the Wall acting as gateways into a less welcoming world. To the south the fields seem altogether more orderly; drystone walls separating hay crops from pastures where sheep and cattle graze. Sandwiched between these two landscapes, the rocky cliffs of Win Sill crest and tumble their way eastwards, a formidable natural barrier capped by the man-made wall.

We meet the first substantial section of Wall at Birdoswald, where it's lumbering presence and serious girth underline its unyielding nature. But it's not until we're east of Greenhead that we encounter the Wall of popular imagination, and up close and personal its size, scale and ambition are utterly breathtaking.

Now I'm a fan of the checks and balances of community influence in planning decisions, but even so it's impossible not to admire the vision and determination of an occupying force to build a wall coast-to-coast that reached close to 20 feet high and 10 feet wide, further defended by a 20 feet deep ditch on the Scottish side. Historians calculate that it took 25 million stones, each measuring 20" x 10" x 6", and just six years to build. In contrast, it took the better part of a decade to

secure planning approval for the Hadrian's Wall Path, given the Wall's status as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

As a feat of engineering it's a magnificent structure, especially in a landscape that's exposed, frequently wet and windy, and where the contours make progress tough going in hiking boots, let alone sandals. Beads of sweat sting my eyes on the sharp uphills, and my legs start to resent slopes as steep as staircases. It feels like slow-paced interval training, with no chance to find a rhythm or rest properly. I've packed as lightly as possible but still find myself wondering what I can jettison to lighten my load.

Only the views offer a reprieve; the stunning snake of a wall slithers through this uncompromising countryside, punctuated by the foundations of milecastle turrets and the occasional fort. Squalls and sunshine demand frequent stops to pull waterproofs on or off until the sheer heat generated by the restless climbs leaves both of us in baselayers. Under the jackets we're getting soaked from the inside, so we might as well enjoy the cooling effect of the rain.

Ahead, the edges of the Whin Sill ridge roll away like waves, each seemingly higher than the last. So it's with some relief that our campsite calls us from the trail just before the highest point of the entire Wall. As we amble downhill to Winshields, my feet catch on tall tussocks and the occasional stone, a sure sign of fatigue.



“....neither Nick nor I are here as fans of *Time Team*. This weekend is a golden chance for two days backpacking through a rugged landscape, with the Wall a handrail to guide us through moor and rough uplands....”

With black clouds brewing we erect our tents in double-quick time and stow kit under their shelter. Dinner for me is a pouch of dehydrated chicken and rice, but it fails to rehydrate properly, leaving me to crunch through the calories. Nick, meanwhile, improvises a powdery pasta dish embellished with whatever he could raid from the fridge this morning – cold cocktail sausages and a cheese string. A small bottle of Tabasco comes to the rescue!

When Christopher McCandless left civilisation behind and trekked into the heart of Alaska, he did so with genuine pioneering spirit, although he survived fewer than 100 days. His journey is captured in the book and film *Into the Wild*. Nick and I prefer the prospect of “Into the Dry”, leaving behind the dampness and midges of our campsite for the comfort of the Twice Brewed pub just down the road. When in Rome...

Camp broken and coffee brewed, it's walk-weary legs that plod back up the steeply-stacked contour lines to reach Hadrian's Wall and a trig point 345m above sea level. The low cloud obscures a distant view, leaving the fortification to reach away infinitely into the gloom. When I spook two grouse into flight from under my feet, it's hard to know who is more startled, the birds or me.

This is a section of Wall to savour, and after a tough 16 miles yesterday Nick and I are in no mood to rush. As we reach each hilltop we stop to take in the view – dark and

brooding moorland to the north, friendlier farmland to the south and just in the lee of the Wall three shimmering, pewter-coloured lakes, Crag Lough, Broomlee Lough and Greenlee Lough. In places, Hadrian's Wall is protected by cliff and deep, natural moat, a truly impregnable barrier.

There are holes, however, not least of which is Sycamore Gap, so-called because there's, err, a giant, solitary oak tree growing in its midst. A sycamore sapling has at least been planted, although this eye-catching dip between two steep slopes is still better known as the Robin Hood Gap, in reference to its role in the Kevin Costner film. In true Hollywood disregard for history and geography, the Nottingham outlaw, who picked up a Californian accent in the Crusades, was filmed walking along the Wall two minutes after arriving back at Dover.

One part of the story does at least ring true – there's a brief section of wall just to the west of the magnificently preserved and restored Housesteads Fort where walking on the wall is allowed. It's broad, flat and grass covered, and there's no escaping the sense of walking with history below my feet.

“Had enough of the climbs yet?” asks Nick as we traipse up another slope to Sewingshields Crag for one more spectacular view. The walk has proved harder than I anticipated, for which I blame the weight of my pack, but it's stirring to see so many fellow walkers heading the other way. Most

are from overseas, Dutch, Germans, Japanese and Americans, all smitten by the Wall and the landscape. They're counting up the milecastles, while we're counting them down. There's a sense of the final credits rolling across the screen as the path approaches the Military Road (B6318) – General Wade's east-west military supply line built on foundations plundered from the Wall.

There are also feelings of diminishing returns as the landscape flattens, and traces of the Wall give way to ditch and stony outcrop. So as we clamber aboard the AD122 in Chollerford for the trip back to Hexham it feels like job done, mission accomplished. Two full days of tough physical exercise in a dramatic landscape; a perfect weekend adventure.

PLAN YOUR TRIP

- There's free parking at Wentworth Leisure Centre in Hexham.
- Northern Rail trains run from Hexham to Bampton about £4 one-way, northernrail.org
- Winshields Camp and Bunk Barn Site charges £9 per person to camp, winshields.co.uk
- The Twice Brewed Inn serves good ale, twicebrewedinn.co.uk
- *Hadrian's Wall Path* by Henry Stedman, £11.99, trailblazer-guides.com, is a very useful guide book.
- Ordnance Survey Explorer OL43 Hadrian's Wall covers the course of the walk.

THE £20,000,000 MAN

Uber-action man Sir Ranulph Fiennes talks about the Marathon des Sables, how it was “one long nightmare”, and his fear of camels.

Words Damian Hall Pictures c/o Marie Curie



he many adventures and achievements of Sir Ranulph Fiennes need no introduction. Quite simply, he's the ultimate action man, the person most of us wish we were. But at 71, the ex-SAS officer and serial world record-breaker has suffered two heart attacks,

undergone a double heart bypass, a cancer operation and has recently developed a form of diabetes. That's enough to consign most right-minded folk to a well-earned, peaceful retirement. But not Sir Ran. None of his ailments were going to stop him from completing the six-day, 156-mile Marathon des Sables (MDS), in 50-degree plus temperatures and becoming the oldest Briton to do so. Though they almost did...

“My aim, before I cop it, is to raise £20 million for charity – mainly Marie Curie. We've found they don't raise as much if I don't succeed in a project. And as I get older it gets more difficult to raise big money.

Generally for fundraising, if you climb a mountain like Everest you will get much more money from donors than if you climb an infinitely more difficult mountain called Panga Danga Wanga Langa. The nice people who give money for charities have heard of Everest, so even though it's pretty easy, they will give money. Likewise, if someone gets to the North Pole and they're the youngest, oldest or they're blind, they get much more money. It's just one of those things. A charity finds it easier if they have some headlining cliché.

I wouldn't have made as much money doing the Marathon des Sables, which calls itself the ‘toughest footrace in the world’, in 2014, because I wouldn't have been the oldest Briton. So I waited for 2015, which was also its 30th year, and they made it tougher than normal.

I'm not much of a runner nowadays. Two years ago I stopped running because I had too much to do on the literary front. But in my book *Mad, Bad And Dangerous To Know* there's a list of running races I used to do; the ACE Races, mountain marathons – I won the Elite Veteran class one year at LAMM (Lowe Alpine Mountain Marathon). I was in the UK B team back in the nineties at the Eco-Challenge world races. The last thing I did was a few years ago in Edale, the High Peak Marathon, and our team won the Veteran class.

Performance coach Rory Coleman (rorycoleman.co.uk), who's run Marathon des Sables 11 times, set me a training programme. I had to run for an hour, preferably not on flat stuff, for four days every week, for four months before the race. At weekends I had to do a four-hour non-stop jog, again preferably with gradient. I was meant to run in a heat chamber. But that was only possible for one hour, for medical reasons, to see how my heart would respond to running in the heat. I also gave up chocolate and sugar puffs – and I still have. Doctors made it clear there would be dire results if I didn't.

At the startline I was apprehensive because I had thought of a 7kg pack – only one stone – as like a coffee cup or a thimble. When I've pulled sledges I've pulled 500lb (227kg) loads, so I didn't think it would be any issue whatsoever. But after a bit of time running with it I realised I had got a bit older since those days, and it actually was a big issue on the back. So that was startling.

I also began to realise that the camel cut-offs were an issue. Although I'm quite capable in cold conditions, because I got designed that way, this thing was incredibly hot. The orders I had from the cardiologist at Bristol Royal Infirmary after my last heart attack was that I shouldn't ever let my heart tick more than 130 beats per minute. So I was thinking: ‘Number one, don't let my heart get stressed



*"I never thought I wouldn't make it.
But there were points where I thought the
camels were getting dangerously close."*

and over 130bpm'. And the other thing, which was diametrically opposed to that, was 'Don't go so slow that you'll be caught up by the camels'. It was a very fine balance between the two, and without Rory I would have gone too far one way or the other.

Quite honestly, it was six days and it was all one long nightmare. I can't really remember one day from the other. The first day was tough; going up the dunes was the hardest part, especially under the midday sun. My shoulders were sore from the pack and my right foot needed looking at afterwards.

At the end of day two, my feet felt bruised, I had a constant pain across my shoulders and this dreadful feeling that I was holding people up behind me. That was constantly on my mind.

On day three there were some warning signs from my heart, so I heeded them and sat on a rock for a bit. As well as a few foot bruises and a big shoulder bruise from the pack, I had a new pain down my left leg.

The 91km fourth stage seemed to go on forever. It took us 30 hours, with just one hour's sleep and I needed medical attention afterwards. At the time I described it as 'more hellish than hell'.

There were very big cliffs with sand. You're trying to go up and your feet are slipping backwards. In terms of going up steep things, it wasn't like the north face of the Eiger. But bearing in mind you're trying to go at a certain speed, it doesn't help having soft stuff under your feet.

I've done an awful lot of work over the years in the biggest deserts in the world, Arabia, the Sahara and all that. But on civilian expeditions, you're on camels not feet. So I didn't appreciate the problems of the soft sand and the effects of making you more tired than if it was firm. When I had been on foot in the deserts, it was in the Arab army in the 1960s and we only moved at night, in a sort of Ninja-like fashion, because of the communist-terrorist ambushes. We were always carrying heavy weapons and moving in a tactical rather than competitive manner.

During the day it was 53 degrees, with very high humidity. A pretty good sort of hell on earth. The heat had an accumulative effect with the soft stuff under feet. When I did the Seven Marathons on Seven Continents – and I have to say that that was Dr Mike Stroud's idea, not mine – I collapsed on the only hot one, in Singapore. I ended up in an ambulance on a drip. When the BBC news people asked me: 'Is that you finished?' And I said: 'Yeah, I'm finished, but Dr Stroud will carry on.' Because as long as one of us did it the whole thing was still a success.

I didn't know that Mike was half an hour behind me peeing blood and being sick. So when he arrived the BBC said: 'Dr Stroud, I understand that Fiennes is dropping out but you're carrying on.' He came into the ambulance wagging his finger at me and said: 'Don't you think for one minute that you're dropping out.'

The night on that fourth day was pretty horrific and what caused my back problems. The headtorch had a big problem and there wasn't much light and I miss-stepped – I thought the ground was much closer than it actually was. So when I landed it was a hell of a jolt. Rory said it was my glutes. From then on I couldn't really walk upright and I needed a lot of painkillers. I started ignoring the instructions on the packet as to how many you can take.

I had several moments when I had to stop and let my heart slow down. On occasions Rory noticed I was going all over the place and he said: 'You must stop now, for a few minutes.'

The balance between the camels and the heart was tight, and we cut it very fine. I began to think – particularly where there were big steep sand dunes – that the camels were going faster than us, that we wouldn't get to the checkpoint before the cut-off. When we did, I asked Rory how much we did it by. He said 13 minutes.

There's a mixture of things going on in your head when things aren't going terribly well. It does help, whatever you're doing, be it the mountains, a marathon or an expedition, to know that you would be letting someone down. In this case someone was dependent for a lot of money, and on the task's completion rather than just attempting it. When you start thinking you're going to give up, you think of the nurses and what they do when the people you love are terminally ill. Which is what happened to me.

When I was about 60 I took on Everest for Marie Curie and on the last night on the Tibetan side of the mountain I had a big angina [i.e. heart] attack, well above 28,000 feet and within 300 metres of the summit ridge. Therefore I had to go back and try it again a few years later in 2008 on the easy side, the Nepal side. Again on the very last night within reach of the summit I turned back because we passed three dead bodies; one of which was my Sherpa's father, one of which was a friend of mine, a Scottish bloke, and one of which was still being buried, he was a very good climber who had just got to the top without oxygen. And it had a bad effect. So I tried again in 2009, which was very easy, and I couldn't understand why I'd had a problem previously.

So I thought the same thing would have had to happen with Marathon de Sables – and it very nearly did. I would have had to do it again which I really wouldn't have wanted to do. I really didn't enjoy it terribly much. I think I've got to a stage where this sort of thing is not really an advisable project.

My feet weren't in terribly good nick. I learnt in Antarctica about a year ago that the trouble with my hands and feet is I've developed pre-Diabetic status. It affects your circulation, first of all in your fingers and feet, especially if they've been frostbitten in the past, which is the case for me. So my circulation isn't good and running with shoes on every day doesn't help. But you stop it getting worse by not having sugar.

Ninety-six people dropped out of the event, there were two broken legs, another one fell down a mountain that he thought was basically sand but was rocks and he cut his face open. One woman I saw at the end had the bottom of one of her foot peeled. I never thought I wouldn't make it. But there were points where I thought the camels were getting dangerously close.

Life in the bivouac was paradise. It was rather like a polar expedition, where you're man-hauling a heavy weight for 10 hours then get in the tent and its heaven on earth. Having lots of people around was really pleasant. Of the people in the tent nine were British and one Swedish. They were a great crowd, as you would expect from people who are competitive and keen. I would get in thinking, 'I wonder how so and so got on – has he managed to get into the first 75 as he's desperate to do?' They were a great bunch and helped take your mind off your own problems."

To donate to Sir Ranulph's challenge visit justgiving.com/ranulph or text RUN to 70007 to donate £5. For more information on Sir Ranulph's challenge visit mariecurie.org.uk/ranulph



*“During the day it was 53 degrees,
with very high humidity. A pretty good
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PITCH UP AND PITCH UP

What a way to go exploring – pack a tent, and all the other gear you'll need (see our gear test on page 96), and go anywhere – well sort of. The legalities are a little confusing but as Stephen Neal explains you can pitch up and pitch up in more places and more ways than you might think.

Words Stephen Neal **Pictures** Shutterstock



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ild camping or sleeping outdoors has been a feature of travel over private land for thousands of years in Britain, and was decriminalised in 1935.

Every square metre of our British Isles is owned and managed by either an individual, a family or a collective of people representing a charity, trust, group or company. The rules these owners and managers must observe regarding sleeping rights over their lands fall into four categories:

- 1** Wild camping enshrined as a legal right, and no permission required from owner or manager (e.g. Scotland and Dartmoor).
- 2** Wild camping allowed under a presumption of historic use, but not as a "right" (e.g. hill walking in upland areas of Wales and northern England) bothies, fishing on canals or 50 percent of foreshore owned by the Crown; vessels that become marooned on the Crown-owned foreshore by the tide as part of a tidal navigation; on board or next to moored vessels/canoes on the network owned and managed by the Canal and River Trust.
- 3** Considered on a case-by-case basis, but only on request from the individual (the majority of landowners outside of 1 and 2), sometimes with a presumption against permission, sometimes not.
- 4** Byelaws or policies introduced that make wild camping an offence because of the potential threat to the environment.

There are many places in Britain where we don't have to ask permission; there are many places where asking permission is polite. But in most cases where asking permission is polite, it is impractical – usually because finding the owner at dusk is unrealistic. In a tiny portion of cases, wild camping is out of the question without written permission, because byelaws (usually indicated by signs) have defined and specific actions as constituting a criminal offence.

There are several differences between criminal and civil law. Trespass is civil law and not a crime. No one can be prosecuted

for trespass. A crime is an offence against the state: murder, robbery, theft, assault.

Breaking a civil law is therefore an offence that only an individual can bring to court for damages. A civil wrong is known as a "tort". There is no civil or criminal wrong aligned with sleeping. But the act of wild camping and being inside a structure such as a tent can be defined as "trespass" if the landowner has not granted permission.

Although the act of trespass is actionable in the courts, the landowner will only be granted nominal damages of a few pounds if there is no loss or damage. The question, really, is whether it is worth it if someone is moving on soon.

The most obvious way to avoid court action is not to damage anything and to move on if asked. Don't break trees, don't cause criminal damage and don't light fires unless you have permission to do so.

Most landowners are reasonable when it comes to travellers sleeping out on their land while passing through. However, there are times when an owner will insist the camper moves on. Negotiating a small fee is an option, but a refusal to leave after that, or an angry outburst, means the civil "trespass" can become more serious. Acting in a threatening or abusive manner is criminal. There's no excuse to remain on private land to sleep once asked to leave, unless in an emergency. Common sense should always prevail.

I've wild camped since I was 17, and only been asked to move on a few times. Once I pitched up my bivy too early at 4pm, on a sunny day, and decided to boil a brew. A few hours later I was off the owner's land, and pitched in a hammock between two trees. Happy, safe and legal. You will almost never have to explain yourself. Although signs that say "Trespassers will be prosecuted" are rare and inaccurate, they're a good indicator that this is not a good place to sleep.

The National Parks Authority website has a section on wild camping, which advises campers to ask landowners' permission, and also offers basic tips, nationalparks.gov.uk

JUST WHERE CAN YOU WILD CAMP?

It can be complicated to know exactly where you can pitch your tent. However here are some guidelines:

1 SCOTLAND From Cape Wrath to Gretna; every loch, trail and white-sand beach. The lowlands, peaks and what's left of the forest. It's impossible to overstate how liberating it feels to roll a tent into the wild virtually anywhere without fear of being asked to move or pay. Freedom to sleep and wild camp was restored as a right in 2003 under the land reform act.

2 MOUNTAINS Although not enshrined in law (except in Dartmoor and Scotland), camping on mountains is mostly considered acceptable as part of a traditional and historic use of hills dating back centuries. Many landowners consider the minimum necessary height for wild camping to be 1500 feet - literally hundreds of hills fall within that category.

3 THE FORESHORE You are unlikely to be breaking the law if you sleep on the foreshore. You are free to night fish, navigate water or to rest while waiting for the tide to return.

4 MIDDLE EARTH You are not breaking the law when you sleep outdoors in Middle Earth if you have the owner's permission, either directly or implied (e.g. kayaking or fishing with a license on a canal). (Middle earth references the largest bit of land, wedged between the foreshore and the mountains. Camping is not illegal here, but it is polite to ask first – see also caveats noted previously)

The 100 camps in my book fall into the four bedzones. The camps are all associated with a single trail, river or canal that is either a place to sleep or an important link to other sites.

4 Great Wild Camping UK Islands

ENGLAND SCILLY ISLES

The Scilly Isles archipelago comprises of 140 islands and islets 28 miles off Land's End. Just five are inhabited. They're owned by the Duchy of Cornwall and since 1930 the islands have had their own county council.

Many of the islands can be walked to at low tide. There is a campsite on St Martin's, near to the beach. Wild camping is not allowed but 24-hour fishing is which necessitates the need to sleep, as is the right to navigate the islands by canoe or kayak. The waters are shallow so it is wise to carry a bivy, warm clothing and food to wait for the tide to return after six hours.

Practical info Forage on seashells and fish 24 hours around the Eastern Isles, south of St Martin's. (49.948536 – 6.2625177).

Travel Fly from Exeter, New Quay or Land's End or by ferry from Penzance. Kayaks and canoes can be taken on the ferry.

WALES – ANGLESEY

Anglesey is Wales's largest island, although it is connected to the mainland by two bridges – this connection does not detract from the nature of separation.

The Anglesey Coastal Path navigates almost the entire costal circumference (124 miles) and the route passes farmland, foreshore, woodland and costal heath and very rarely leaves the sea.

Practical info Walk more than 20 miles anti-clockwise along the costal path, from just south of the Menai Strait/Britannia Bridge (53.185465 – 4.2218399) to Carmel Head (53.185465 – 4.5737457), and find caves, sandy coves and foreshore all the way for camping and foraging.

Travel Railway stations on Anglesey include Holyhead Valley, Rhosneigr, Ty Croes, Bodorgan and Llanfairpwll.

IRELAND – SALT ISLAND

Walking and cycling trails are all around. The Castle Ward Boundary Trail follows eight miles from the Shore car park to Audley's Castle. Separate walks for example from Delamont County Park and Killyleagh lead down to the waterside. Waiting for the tide to go down is a good time to access the quieter parts. Canoes can explore the island. A bothy is located on Salt Island just south of Killyleagh – one of 11 canoe launch places on the circular Strangford Lough Canoe Trail. You'll have to pay to use the bothy but it's free to camp on the other side of the island at North Bay or along the shore at one of the loading stations.

Practical info Explore by canoe or kayak and wild camp in any one of 40 islands off the coast of Whiterock (54.470087 – 5.6222534). Walk the causeway to the six-acre Rough Island at low tide (54.56438613).

Travel Trains and buses to Belfast, Bangor, Newtownards, Killinchy, Greyabbey, Portaferry and Strangeford.

SCOTLAND - SUMMER ISLES

The Summer Isles are drenched in thousands of acres of sea forest. Weed and algae bulge from the Atlantic blue. The clear waters around these islands are refreshingly warm as they are heated by the Gulf Stream. Mind you I still wear a wetsuit in case someone has turned the temperature down over the pond!

The seaweed can be eaten or explored. One of the Summer Isles is developed – Tanera Mor has a café and post office and a single-track that navigates the eastern anchorage. The other islands require basic living.

Canoe-camping is the easiest way to explore the coves and tracks. Priest Island is off the west coast of Wester Ross. There are several caves, one of which (on the south side) is thought to have been home to a Popish priest.

The Cape Wrath Trail passes the main shore next to the Isle of Martin and Loch Kanaird.

Practical info Go snorkelling off Isle of Ristol's sandy white beach (58.048228 – 5.433830); canoe-camp on the foreshore of any of the uninhabited smaller islands in June for a chance to see basking sharks and whales (57.98718 – 5.5096436).

Travel Buses run to Ullapool; ferries to the islands; or drive to Altandhu and kayak out to the islands from the shore.

Many of the islands can be walked to at low tide



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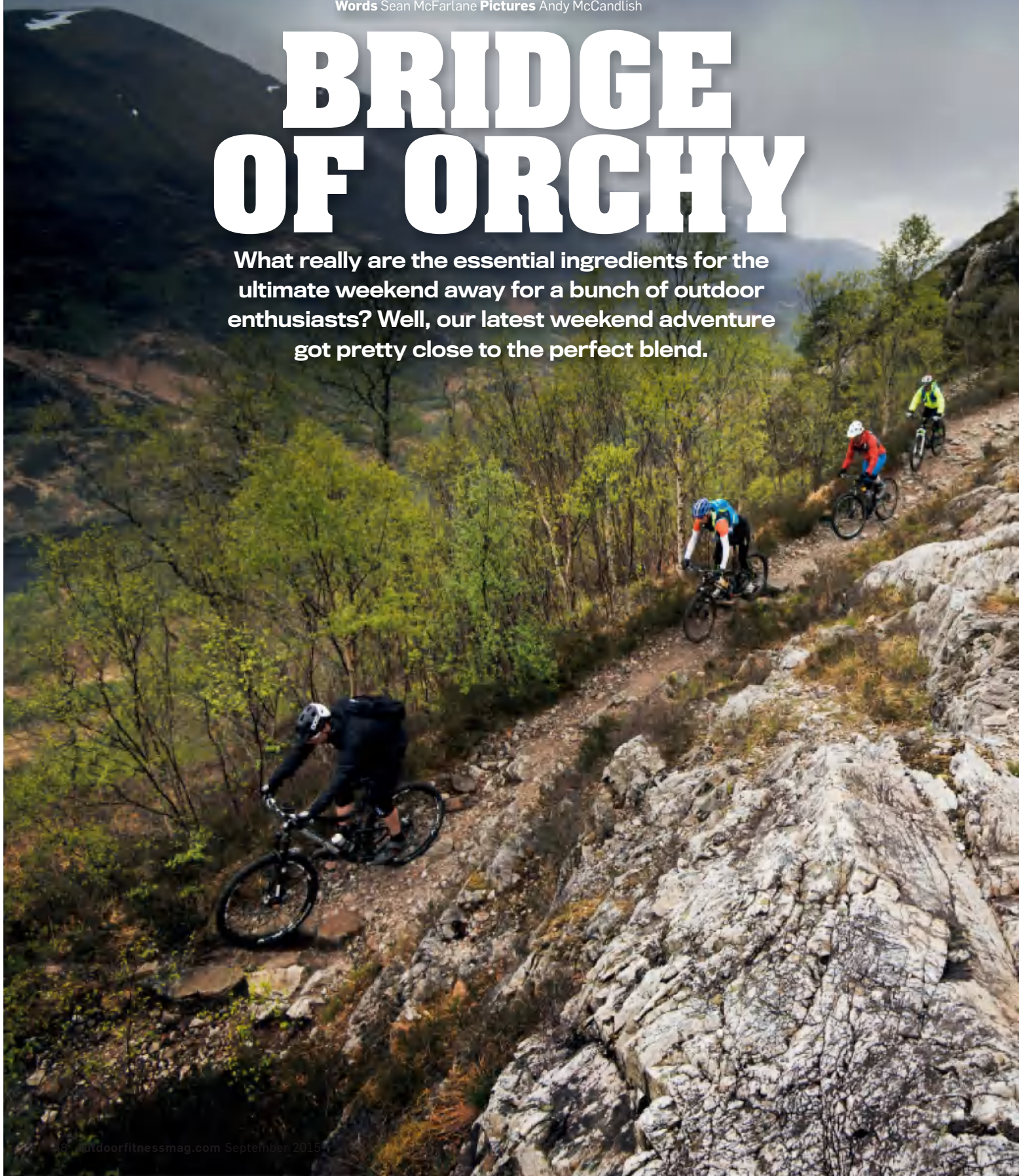
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Raising
funds for
people with
spinal cord
injuries

Words Sean McFarlane Pictures Andy McCandlish

BRIDGE OF ORCHY

What really are the essential ingredients for the ultimate weekend away for a bunch of outdoor enthusiasts? Well, our latest weekend adventure got pretty close to the perfect blend.





F

or such a small place Bridge of Orchy seems to be blessed with a lot; not only does the West Highland Way (WHW) go through it, it also has a train station as well as a

fabulous hotel. They all combine perfectly to make it the ideal location for weekend warriors like us.

At the end of another Friday that seemed to drag on forever we choose to take the car to Bridge of Orchy. As we arrive we speculate how those Canary Warf mega workers could jump on the overnight sleeper and wake up here on Saturday morning. Nice.

Our train the following day leaves at mid morning so just a few post-meal beverages are on the cards tonight. As we eat our evening meal we ponder over maps; the WHW is however very well signposted though, so this was more a tradition rather than a necessity. We head out onto the balcony for a nightcap. It's a glorious early summer's evening but we're not lulled into any false sense of security so we check our phones for tomorrow's weather. Dave does his usual scouring of all available forecasts until he finds one he likes; but it's clear to all that the day would start well and tail off after mid afternoon. That's fine with us as we calculate we should almost be back to the hotel by then, safe in the knowledge we have our warm and comfortable beds just waiting for us to collapse into after some quality refuelling.

We duly retire to those beds that evening, bellies full with plenty of calories on board ready to be burnt off the following day. I am asleep before my head hits the pillow.

Saturday morning dawns dry and still, as promised by our familiar advisers at the Met Office. It's a morning full of promise and as I awake, I'm very glad I wasn't camping. My passion for Scotland will never wane but where insects have such an affect that they give rise to a verb, take notice. I've been "midged" more than enough in my time. One look at the campers outside gives me confirmation, if ever it was needed, that we've made the right choice of lodgings.

After a good stint of solid grazing, we assemble our bikes and various accessories for the day. Our route will be 38 miles of varying terrain off-road biking along the WHW, from its northern most point in Fort William back to our hotel. We may have spent the night in very comfortable accommodation but we're all well aware that today's ride has large sections of seriously remote trail. So we make sure we have plenty of kit, both in terms of clothing and bike tools, between the four of us. Our group is the usual mix of abilities, lifestyles and wallet sizes, and that's all reflected in our gear. Chris and I are pretty similar with "old school", perhaps the best description. Dave is a hill runner, and fairly new to off road biking; he's still having some teething



problems with the transition. Then there's "bling-tastic" Gav – "the more expensive the better". I've no idea what many of his tools are supposed to do but I have faith in him that they're all needed. Anyway he can carry what he wants in his rucksack which seems to have compartments for every day of the year.

We all have a mid morning latte just to check the engines are started, and then make the two-minute cycle to the train platform. We casually chat to a very friendly Dutch chap who is keen to know what we're doing. We tell him our plan for the day and he seems very keen to join us next time. His enthusiastic nods seem to be in perfect timing with the chugging of the train as it arrives into the station. "All the best Hans", we shout as we board.

Our train journey is part of the world famous West Highland line. What a superb start to our day's adventure. Eyes glued to the window, it's hard not to be impressed by the scenery as we glide over Rannoch Moor. The train noticeably lurches as its passengers move to its left side to take photos of the magnificent Loch Treig and the snowy peaks above it. We then head westwards and on to Fort William. As we arrive, the legs tingle knowing that there's only one way back, for us at least.

A final quick check that we have everything that we need and we're off. Ben Nevis looks on invitingly but she'll have to wait on this occasion as we head up Glen Nevis on a wide smooth track, through the forest and south westwards. There are lots of walkers heading towards us on the path, no doubt having seen the forecast and keen to finish their day by early afternoon, but there's plenty of space, and it's a very friendly place to be today. As we get out of the forest, the route opens up and the mountains provide an impressive grandstand as we pick our way through. The riding is superb with a real mix of terrain. It's more or less all bike-able but does require attention. As usual the trickiest bits seem to be saved for the biggest audiences. The pressure's on but we all cope well.

We reach Lairigmor (the Great Pass) at 900 feet. The mountains now seem to tighten their grip around our corridor. This is certainly remote country. The walkers have gone now and it's just us. Last night Gav had been telling us about the descent into Kinlochleven, we all know he likes his technical terrain so there's a certain sense of

trepidation as we see the right hand turn. Just as Gav promised, the track narrows up and the brain turns on. A quick check to make sure we're in the correct descending order – that's long been established by now – and we batter down. Gav's off and doesn't seem to be using his brakes. "Speed's your friend", he shouts as his voice fades with him into the distance. Hmm, heard that before. The track zigzags down with plenty of wet slabs of rock to keep you focused. We all manage it at our own pace. I arrive at the bottom to see Chris, elbows on handlebars and head slumped. As I

"My passion for Scotland will never wane but where insects have such an affect that they give rise to a verb, take notice."

arrive he looks up and smiles approvingly. I look back as Dave arrives, his face puffing and shaking his head. "I've never biked anything like that before", he says. Gav starts to yawn having been here for a while. But we're about to get our own back.

The climb out of Kinlochleven is the steepest of the day. As we ride, the chat lessens and the breathing gets heavier. Our descending order is now reversed. Gav's no longer his chatty self. Dave isn't even sweating. Chris and I are somewhere between the two. Eventually the route begins to level. We can see and feel the weather beginning to close in on us. We're not far from our base but there's still some testing riding to be done. The route here has plenty of short stretches which are right on the edge of my riding ability, and there are precious few soft landing areas here. Conscious of the need to push on, we enjoy a banter-less section. It's my favourite part of the day. As I take a quick pee I gaze around over Rannoch Moor. We were only there a few hours ago in the warm comfort of a train carriage but at this point it seems like last year. Luckily I hear some voices before they see me – I don't want to be caught literally with my pants down – and I hop back on the bike.

The other three have stopped to regroup and Gav turns to me with a grin that I know can mean only one thing – descent time. There's a good clue in the name of this section – the infamous "Devil's Staircase". I've done

plenty of satanic named sections of trails and I know what's in store here. Descending order re-established and down we go, at varying speeds. Once again, it's supreme off-road biking at its unbeatable best. Suitably jolted, we re-gather and head along to the Kingshouse Hotel. On another occasion we might have stopped here for something to eat but the rain has now started and we know the end is in sight, almost literally. Up and over the Black Mount, we see the twin peaks of Beinn an Dothaidh and Beinn Dorain which brings smiles to all our faces, knowing as we do that our hotel is tucked in below them. The rain is now set in for the day but it only adds to the experience. We'll be warm and cosy soon.

The trail is now wide and it's easy riding. We're making quick progress. Energy levels are waning and it's very much "head down" time. We reach the tiny settlement of Inveroran. Only two miles left. In order to preserve the track itself, bikers are asked not to use the track from here to Bridge of Orchy, and instead take the single-track road. No complaints from us whatsoever with that. We whizz along the now wet tarmac.

We're quickly on to the bridge itself at Bridge of Orchy and we're back. What a day. I'd been thinking of dinner for some time now not to mention a few aperitifs. We head off to shower and change then quickly reconvene in the hotel bar to relive the day.

The body's aching nicely – I know I'll sleep well tonight. We all agree that the ride has been one of the best we've ever done. With its very varied mixture of terrain, it very much has the feel of having something for everyone. On a day filled with so many likely candidates, it's difficult to agree a particular highlight. But strangely enough when pushed we all agree on a part which involved no biking at all – the train journey to the start.

We muse over alternatives. You could certainly continue south along the West Highland Way the following day to Crianlarich which is 13 miles away. We agree that thereafter the trail becomes a bit stop start and boggy. Dave knows as he's run it several times. Another round of drinks quickly raises a new angle – could you run it? Dave frowns as Chris and I insist on adding an overnight stay at Kinlochleven if any on foot plans were confirmed. Gav kindly offers bike-based support. One thing's for sure, we'll be back!



FACT FILE

Accommodation – we stayed at the Bridge of Orchy hotel, bridgeoforchy.co.uk

Train – train timetables, fares and information on how to pre-book your bike are on ScotRail's website, scotrail.co.uk

Best time of year to go – the Scottish Highlands in summer do get busy and whilst there's plenty of space for everyone, you do want to be guaranteed both comfortable lodgings and

a space for you and your bike on the train. The WHR too can get busy, at least in parts, so we would recommend April, September or October as being the ideal months for this one. But any time out of peak winter would also work.

Alternatives – Bridge of Orchy is perfectly placed for out and back routes along the WHW. The Kingshouse Hotel in Glencoe is a well known pit stop and is 12 miles north. To

the south, the villages of Tyndrum and Crianlarich are seven and 13 miles away respectively. The Glencoe ski centre is well worth a visit for snow sports lovers in winter too. With its chairlift continuing to operate in summer it also gives you some fantastic high level walk or run options. For those of you that find even the most technical sections of the WHR too easy, be sure to give the downhill trails here a go!



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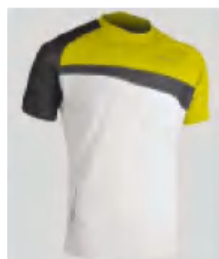
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TRAIN



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Bolt on speed work

Last issue we looked at the benefits of speed work for cyclists, now it's the runners' turn.

WITH THE WORLD athletic championships coming to an end as this issue hits the shelves will it have been a victory for Usain Bolt in the blue ribbon 100m race? Can you as an endurance runner learn anything (legally!) from the fast men that will speed up your endurance?

Sprinters perform runs over 50-500m at intensities from 70 percent to flat out when training. Recoveries vary reflecting the purpose of the training session. However, 400m sprinters, in particular will often use very short recoveries, running near flat out efforts for 30-45sec, across a number of repetitions and sets. It's this type of training (or more exactly the protocol) that could benefit endurance types.

Sports science shows that sprint interval training (SIT) boosts endurance across all levels of performer. For example, 5km performance was increased in a group of thirty un-trained 18-25 year olds who performed SIT (1). The intervention group of 20 completed an increasing number of flat out sprints (up to 12, as the weeks progressed), three times a week for four weeks. The control group did no specific training. It was found that the SIT group ran 4.5% quicker over 5km compared to their performance at the beginning of the study. Their VO2max was increased by 4.5% too – VO2max is a key indicator of endurance ability.

A further research review also considered the value of SIT for developing endurance (2). Research containing the words "sprint interval training", "high intensity intermittent training/exercise", "aerobic capacity", and "maximal oxygen uptake" was considered. The team found that SIT methods had numerous positive effects when it came to boosting endurance. For example, and referencing VO2max, 8% increases were discovered. The researchers pointed out that this is a figure that was not too dissimilar from that which could be achieved by more traditional endurance training methods i.e. steady state aerobic efforts. "Relative to continuous endurance training of moderate intensity, SIT presents an equally effective alternative with a reduced volume of activity," said the researchers.

So as an endurance runner make sure you include speed sessions aka SIT in your training.

References: 1.J Strength Cond Res. 2015 Feb 2. [Epub ahead of print]
2.Sports Med. 2014 Feb;44(2):269-79. doi: 10.1007/s40279-013-0115-0.



3D TREKKING

Sebastien Foucan's Freerunning Academy

Intrepid Outdoor Fitness scribe Maxwell Roche sets off for an urban 3D trek. Advised that he may crack something if he falls, Maxwell pays particular attention to the advice of Mr freerunning - Sebastien Foucan.



Maxwell Roche
and Sebastien
Foucan all smiles
before the off.



A SHORT TIME ago, whilst surfing the internet I happened across a YouTube clip entitled *Ultimate Parkour Fails*. Knowing little about the practice of Parkour I let curiosity get the better of me and hazarded a click. Anyone who has already seen *Ultimate Parkour Fails* will understand my shock (and awe), as I witnessed a seemingly never ending stream of urban accidents. Wincing repeatedly between bursts of guilt-infused laughter I watched as Parkour enthusiasts or freerunners as they are often referred to, ran around the city risking limb and often life attempting to vault, jump and somersault over seemingly insurmountable walls, across impossible gaps and within inches of lethal precipices. Now I'm a stickler for a bit of slapstick comedy but it was blindingly obvious that these guys and girls weren't taking such hefty risks just to keep unsympathetic people like me amused. So why then? What was to be gained from performing these wild and potentially life ending feats? I needed to know more...

In the heart of West London there's an academy and running that academy there's a man, and within that man lies the secret. His name is Sebastien Foucan - the founder of freerunning. Foucan was born in the Parisian suburb of Lisses and there it all began.

"Look up zer!" said Sebastien pointing to the top of a tall crane outside Latimer Road Tube station, "We go?" I squinted up toward the crane and then back toward him with a "please be joking" look on my face. The James Bond fans among you will empathise with me here. After all, the Sebastien Foucan in whose company I now found myself was the very same Sebastien Foucan who acted in the opening sequence of *Casino Royale*, fist fighting with Daniel Craig on top of a not too dissimilar crane. Earlier that week I'd contacted his academy and as luck would have it, managed to book into a few of his evening classes. As previously mentioned I'd become intrigued by the practice of Parkour/freerunning and I wanted to discover for myself, from a pioneer of the discipline no less, not only the motivations behind the discipline, but its potential for the likes of you and me.

When I turned up at Latimer Road it was a balmy spring evening and Sebastien was ready to greet me, all smiles, together with a motley crew of would-be freerunners. Slightly self-conscious about my shorts, which were a little on the tight side for a streetwise Parkour posse, I was reassured to see Sebastien himself clad in a pair of Lycra running tights. I asked cheekily if he'd developed a penchant for them while performing in ITV's *Dancing on Ice*.

"The idea Sebastien told us is to paint a personal picture on the urban landscape and overcome whatever obstacles present themselves in a way that best suits you as an individual."

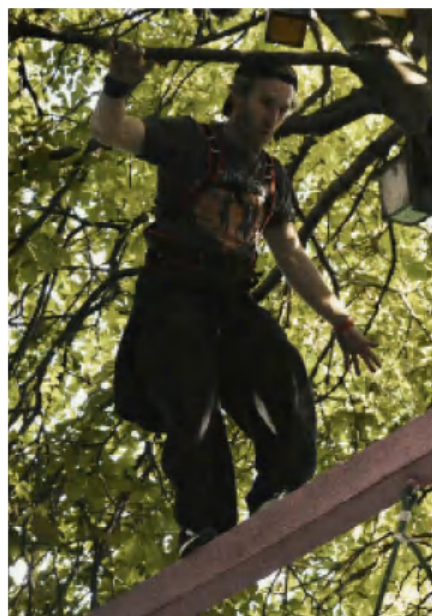
Chuckling he replied: "It's just my way now, my Satori". He went on to explain that Satori is a Japanese Zen Buddhist term for "Seeing into one's true nature, and finding one's own path". Never before have I heard a man speak so profoundly about his choice of trousers. Having had enough of the small talk Sebastien soon beckoned us all with an outstretched arm and skipped off: "Follow me," he said "Now we go trekking".

"Urban Trekking" (as Sebastien calls it) is the basis for an evening spent freerunning. Best described it is a spritely, multi-directional jog on the balls of one's feet. Whilst jogging you follow a designated leader in whichever direction they choose but not (and this is key), on their exact path. The idea Sebastien told us is to paint a personal picture on the urban landscape and overcome whatever obstacles present themselves in a way that best suits you as an individual. There's no right or wrong path he explained, it's just important to choose the one that feels most natural and artistic. Along the way on our initial trek we encountered steel railings, stone bollards, brick walls and staircases, and each of us negotiated them

differently, some would snake around while others would vault across and between. Damn, this was so much more fun than plain old jogging.

Already sweating after just five minutes of leaping, bounding and balancing I was relieved when we eventually pulled up for a breather. Hunched over, hands on knees I looked up in the direction of a long staggered brick wall, one section of which stood around eight foot tall the other around 12. "OK" said Sebastien leaving me little time to recover: "Choose a wall, climb up and jump down. There's only one rule, always land on your toes!" Everyone in the group soon started running toward the smaller of the two walls, springing up and grabbing the top so I followed suit, determined not to show myself up. Sebastien watched as I hoisted myself up and over and with a knowing half-smile turned to me afterwards: "Well done" he said, "Now, did you under or overestimate yourself?" Unsure I shrugged a little in response but didn't reply. "You underestimated yourself didn't you? Please climb that one instead" - he said pointing at the far more intimidating 12-foot wall. Feeling flattered, but no more confident, and still not wanting to embarrass myself, I took an even lengthier run up and leapt for the top. As my fingers lodged on the highest bricks and I hauled myself up cheers rang out among the group. He was right I'd underestimated myself.

Later that day I had the opportunity to ask Sebastien a few questions. My primary objective was to find out if the practice of Freerunning could benefit sportspeople of other disciplines. According to Sebastien, unlike most traditional outdoor pursuits freerunning is plyometric and involves the muscles moving from extension to contraction in a rapid explosive manner. This he said bears many similarities to the strength, power and conditioning required by martial arts athletes. Climbing and jumping he says are "what we are made for", and dynamic three-dimensional strength and flexibility, heavily involving core power and balance, can indeed be useful whatever your chosen sport. I asked him if he thought a similar type of fitness could be achieved in the gym: "All those beefed up orange guys at the gym, pump reps and limit



themselves, they all try to look the same and follow the same monotonous routine. In Freerunning we don't follow". I asked him to elaborate and he made an interesting reference to the Hindu philosophy of Ayurveda. He explained how over thousands of years Indian doctors had developed a system of medicine designed to treat patients based not only on their ailment but on the individual characteristics of their minds and bodies. He drew parallels between this philosophy and his own: "As freerunners we explore our individual natures, strengths, weaknesses and develop accordingly, we don't prescribe set exercises or any particular doctrine. "I took all that to mean he's not a big fan of the gym, a sentiment I'm sure many OF readers will share..."

Next up was the Sloth walk. Seb had led us all to a circular steel bar, only about 12 centimetres above the ground, running 10 or so metres around a flower bed. He encouraged us to make progress along it using both hands and feet in smooth relaxed movements, like a sloth. His strong French accent hindered his pronunciation of the word sloth which we all had a chuckle over - Sebastien included. Initially we gripped the bar tightly, as if life depended on it, and moved along in single-file using erratic technique, shaking with exertion and losing balance often. Frowning humorously once again Sebastien demonstrated. "You need to be loose" he said, "Like a cat. Don't struggle against it, lengthen your body, straighten your arms and keep that animalistic flow." With this advice in mind we all gave it a second attempt and astonishingly nearly every single person in the group made it right the way along the bar without falling.

When the class was over I asked Sebastien how he'd come to learn the techniques he'd been teaching us. In answer he harked back to his days growing up in Paris and spoke of his fellow pioneer, friend and mentor David Belle. David he said was always the brave one, they were kids exploring the city, using their natural athleticism to have fun, David would run and he would try to keep up. "It was always about fun," he said, "Never a competition, just a series of never ending and increasingly difficult challenges".

They'd always encourage each other, make a game of everything and in doing so overcome the fear that inevitably arose when the stakes got higher. This playful Peter Pan-esque energy that radiates from Sebastien is definitely something at the heart of his ideology. "When children play they develop," he said, "So as adults we need to keep playing too".

The afternoon's final challenge manifested itself in the form of a three-inch balance beam on top of a nine-foot climbing frame. Still panting

"What he wanted us to do was climb to the top of the frame, walk along its uppermost bar and climb back down. According to Sebastien the bar had quite a high crack factor..."

from the most recent bout of "trekking" we gathered anxiously awaiting our instructions. Based on previous experience we expected to be asked to swing from or jump up and grab the beam but alas, Sebastien had something altogether more perilous in store. What he wanted us to do was climb to the top of the frame, walk along its uppermost bar and climb back down. According to Sebastien the bar had quite a high "crack factor", meaning we were likely to land with a fairly substantial crack if we got it wrong! All of a sudden the consequences of messing it up had got a lot more sinister, a broken arm or leg being almost inevitable. Nevertheless one by one we attempted the climb, all of us making unbearably slow progress and shaking like 1970s disco dancers. Despite the involuntary dance moves we all completed the task without injury only to be greeted once more by Sebastien's mischievous grin. "That took five minutes" he said "Now we do it in one". Yelps of disbelief rang out but reluctantly we fell back into line and readied ourselves for a second helping. So, once again we climbed. The consequences hadn't changed, the bar was still a long way from the ground but somehow the

second time round we made it look so much easier. In fact we completed the climb in well under the ambitious one-minute limit. Sebastien explained afterwards that the Kung Fu Fighting monks of Shaolin, whose methods he often emulates, use a similar technique in their training. They practice unceasingly, teaching their muscles to remember, and then through meditation they endeavor to put aside thought, fear and emotion, and act with complete clarity of mind. To a similar end Sebastien, by asking us to speed up during the task, hadn't removed our focus but he'd left less time for our emotions to take hold. No longer inhibited by fear, and already practiced, we were all able to move across the beam with freedom, smoothly and without hesitation.

If like me you're a bit of a cynic when it comes to Zen, spirituality and the like, you're no doubt rolling your eyes a little whilst reading this; but the truth is... Sebastien won me over. I consider myself a person of average athleticism and enjoy a variety of activities but this one is unique. In one afternoon I explored my personal limits and more importantly discovered some hidden strengths. I also learned techniques used to overcome fear and obstacles. Freerunning not only teaches you psychological lessons but physical ones as well, muscles I never knew I had ached the following day. And so to summarise, it's free, a killer workout, mentally and physically rewarding, and unlike any outdoor pursuit I can think of its creative and expressive. That in my book makes it worth a crack - err not of the type Sebastien had intimated about though. After an hour with Sebastien you'll never look at a bollard or a park bench the same way again. He's right when he says: "The city streets are a training ground just waiting to be unlocked," but whatever you do, know your limits and carefully consider undertaking any obstacle with a high risk factor. And if after careful consideration you still decide to undertake said obstacle, at least make sure you've a loyal friend ready with a video camera. That way when you're writhing in pain waiting for the ambulance to arrive you'll have the small consolation of a guaranteed feature in the 2016 edition of *Ultimate Parkour Fails*.



Maxwell acts like a Sloth



3D Trekking it really is!

Bike to Board

Bryce Dyer swaps his TT bike for a board and a paddle to test his speed, skill and balance on water in the fast growing water sport of stand up paddle boarding.

I'VE BEEN INVOLVED in competitive sport for around 30 years, and as my own sporting journey has unfolded, I've moved through several sports – some with greater success than others. Somewhere along the line, I found that cycle time trialling provided me with the best balance between my interest in sports' technology and my caveman instinct for going flat out for as long as possible. However, I've always had a childhood interest in paddle sports. I'd have loved to have given sprint kayaking a go but there was no where near me that did it when I was growing up. And rather unfortunately I know that I have the balance of a drunk – which meant that I was always going to have a ceiling placed on how well I could do when stability would ultimately prove as important as fitness. Nonetheless, last year I discovered standup paddleboarding (SUP) which went some way to finally addressing this interest. SUP is a relatively new competitive

sport to the UK. Whilst races and competition have only been around for the last half dozen years or so, the actual activity itself has deep historical roots. Some often assume that with its use of a board it's a modern evolution of surfing. However, the little evidence that I've found alternatively proposed that it pre-dates it, and instead evolved from other paddle-based sports such as Hawaiian outriggers or North American canoeing.

SUP boards have generally remained focused on usability and accessibility meaning that unlike many other water sports, the attraction is that anyone can get on a board and be moving in seconds with virtually no learning curve. For those wishing to push the pace a little though, this same accessibility has also meant that these same people can likely still buy the same race board as a national champion, and have a fair chance of staying upright on it after some

practise. For someone like me, this was ideal.

What I hadn't realised going into it though was how physically demanding SUP actually is. The reality is that you use multiple muscle groups from head to toe... all whilst being balanced on an unstable surface. It's the equivalent of doing a circuit class whilst simultaneously performing yoga and trying to motor race. The first time I went out for over an hour, I was trashed for two days, and was so sore from top to tail afterwards that I couldn't think of another exercise to do that wouldn't aggravate something that hadn't already been fatigued.

True to form though, it only took me a handful of weeks before I got bored of just hiring boards and wanted to progress to some racing. The beauty of the sports relative infancy is that the forms of racing you can do vary wildly in both type and environment. There are long or short distance races held on lakes, rivers or the sea.



"...unlike many other water sports, the attraction is that anyone can get on a board and be moving in seconds with virtually no learning curve..."



There are also more technical races held in the same environments which involve navigating a more complex course comprising a series of buoys and turns.

The races in the UK vary from those as short as a few minutes long to some that will take someone of reasonable fitness around two hours to complete and this is part of the enjoyment. Such is the challenge - either physically or when dealing with the elements - that makes SUPing a really satisfying day out. Some events have a "cruising" or leisure-based board class where you can use any kind of board that suits you - these are in many ways similar to cycle sportives or park runs where the emphasis is on going the distance and enjoying the day, rather than cut and thrust win at all cost attitudes.

I started racing in a local series in Bournemouth last winter to get some experience, and to make the inevitable mistakes we can all make as we try something new. For me, I realised that if you remained dry (and even the very best fall in every now and then) the heat you personally generate doing SUP is immense. In my first race I overdressed in a wetsuit and went into my own personal meltdown. At the

next event, I'd underestimated just how many calories you burnt and realised I'd hadn't had enough to eat before the race. I bonked halfway through, and was virtually on my knees by the finish. However, the sport is welcoming to newcomers and unlike many others I've taken part in, you can still exchange tales of woe or glory whilst rubbing shoulders with some of the country's best paddlers afterwards without concerns of ego or status.

The many faces I've met in the sport so far have actually come from a wide cross section of physical backgrounds. For example, some are surfers, some are from other endurance sports but many more are just those who were looking for their next physical challenge. The shapes of paddlers also vary wildly from those who look like they would do a good job of supporting the back row of a rugby scrum to those built more slightly that look more like runners. The sport rewards the strong, the fit or the most technically proficient but crucially you don't need to have all of these qualities to be in the thick of it. SUP is for everyone and nobody in particular.

What made SUP challenging for me is that it's one of the few sports I've ever tried that does

require a degree of technical skill. In SUPs' case, the key to technique mainly centres on the paddling action. I've seen the technique vary from those that have a tendency to power at a slow grinding level of brute force to those who rev their paddle at a high cadence like a hummingbird flapping its wings. It's all about efficiency but how you generate that is up to you. Paddling appears simple enough but the key is to put the paddle in the water and then pull yourself past it (using your body's core and its rotation), rather than making the assumption that you pull the paddle itself back through the water. The paddle will need to be switched from side-to-side every so many strokes to maintain a straight course. When I first started, this was as much as every six or seven strokes whereas the best can paddle for 20-30 strokes on one side without changing. All in all, it's a lot to think about.

Once I completed some winter races, I decided to try the odd summer race alongside my current cycling ambitions by partaking in the SUP National Series, organised and managed by UKSUPclubs (uksupclubs.co.uk). You can choose from a range of races on their website. Here are some of my experiences...



LIFE ON BOARD

BEFORE THE START There is typically a pre-race briefing where all of the event's course and safety information is covered. I have realised that I still always get those damn pre-race nerves (and the unpredicted urge to run for the toilet) as I stand there waiting.

Any unfamiliarity with being on open water might put a few people off. This personally didn't worry me as I sailed in the eighties, competed in Surf Lifesaving in the late ninties, went to triathlon in the noughties and worked part time as an RNLI beach lifeguard for over a decade. However, whilst you need to apply the usual expectations of common sense, all of the races were well organised with plenty of safety cover provided. In addition, all paddlers are required to use a leash that tethers themselves to their boards in the event they fall off.

The paddlers are all put into groups and these are defined by their board type (typically defined by its length) and gender. Each group gets its own start and these were typically separated by about a few minutes. Many of the bigger events often see around a hundred paddlers; so breaking the field down makes the starts less intimidating, congested and stop those in other classes drafting off different ones to gain an unfair advantage.

THE START The start of a SUP race is reminiscent of my time in mountain bike racing where the gun goes and everyone goes hell for leather for the first couple of minutes. It's all about establishing

your position before everything settles down to a pace that resembles something sustainable. Go too hard too soon and you'll be burning energy you won't have at the end. However, go too easy and you'll miss the many "draft trains" that form that allow you to slipstream others. Drafting is the act of positioning yourself behind (or slightly to the side and rear) of another paddler to slipstream their path or to use the wake they generate to add speed to your own board. It's not dissimilar to what you see in cycling.

During the winter, the events were smaller but I found I was getting so much chop and wake turbulence from the fastest paddlers that the water went from its flat, glass like finish to something resembling a washing machine very quickly. It took me the first couple of minutes to get into my stroke and to stop worrying about falling in. On this subject, there is a balance you need to strike between the speed that the narrowest boards provide coupled with their respective reduction in stability. No board is fast if its paddler is in the water!

At my first national event in Nottingham, I tried to avoid this problem by staying out of trouble and therefore positioned myself further back from the start line. This proved costly as I missed latching onto paddlers that I spent the next two hours desperately trying to chase down. At the second national series event on the Thames, I noticed that there was a strong downriver current that threatened to push people

over the startline. As a result, I again held back but when the start gun went, I was still too far away and missed my start again. Yes, my starts are a work in progress!

TURNING AROUND At most races, the start and finish are normally in the same place so there is normally at least a buoy or two you have to turn around during the race. There's a lot of ground you can gain with a fast turn. Plus, several paddlers are often coming together at this point so if people are going to fall in, this is often where it happens.

The fastest way to turn a board is do a pivot turn. This involves paddling full speed into the buoy then at the last minute stepping or hopping back towards the rear of the board so that you are positioned as close over its fin as possible. The shift in weight causes the nose of the board to lift out of the water and one strong paddle pull will spin it round on a dime. However, this requires commitment and the board becomes very unstable. The slightly more conservative option is where the paddler places their paddle into the water and holds it there on the side they want the board to spin towards. This keeps the board more stable but can make the board come to a dead stop which costs time. Most opt for this method.

THE FINISH Like many sports, a lot of drama can happen in the closing stages. Maybe you're running out of energy and being closed down by those behind.

Maybe you're toe-to-toe with others around you, and an inevitable sprint finish looms. In Nottingham I'd caught two paddlers up with a mile to go but pushed too hard to get them and needed to recover by drafting behind them. However, the paddler in front didn't want to do all of the hard work whilst then likely being outsprinted at the finish by those of us sheltering behind. Like cycling, it's important to share the work if you're in a group but when it gets down to the last mile or two, its bluff and counter-bluff or just a straight drag race to the line. In this case, the paddler in front stopped paddling completely to force one of us to come through. I decided that was the time to go early. I hoped to avoid towing the two of them by sprinting early to eject them from my draft and then try to hang on to the finish. I hung on but things remained dicey with the pair of them just 20 yards behind me the entire time working furiously to close me down. That kind of close racing was great and everyone had their tales afterwards.

It's been said that SUP is the fastest growing watersport in the world. Bearing in mind I started SUP purely as form of cross training, I've really enjoyed the laid back atmosphere and the fantastic sensation you get after a hard paddle. The sport is very early in its life and this means that every event has plenty of smiles, plenty of stories and great optimism for its future. I think next year I'll ramp things up a bit and have a proper tilt at getting faster.





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WORKOUT PROTOCOL

For optimal use, choose a workout area that's flat and non-slip, has an overhead anchor point that's seven to nine feet off the ground, and is strong enough to support your weight. The TRX can be strapped to anything from a goal post, to a tree or chain link fence, for example. This workout is designed to use the multi-directional strength developing aspects of the TRX. You should perform each exercise with control and try to keep a 2:2 lift to lower ratio. So for the chest press, lower to a two-count and press back to starting using a further two-count.

■ **Do as many reps as possible given the 2:2 ratio in 45 seconds** (unless otherwise instructed). Take a further 45 seconds and repeat the exercises. Do 3-6 sets of each depending on your fitness and the time you have available. Once you have completed all your sets of one exercise, take a further 45 seconds and move on to the next exercise in the sequence.

■ **Always warm up before your workout.** Do five to 10 minutes of jogging followed by functional movements for all body parts, such as marching on the spot, calf raises and arm swings. Cool down with five minutes of easy jogging and some held stretches.

■ **Who's this workout for?** Since it covers all your key muscles groups, it's beneficial for any sport that require strong arms, legs and core muscles – name us one that doesn't! However, it's specifically great for your core as suspension training engages lots more stabilising muscle than more standard versions of the exercises

■ **Total workout time** should be around 30 to 40 minutes.



1 CHEST PRESS

How to: Use a long strap. Stand facing away from the anchor, extend the arms out in front at shoulder-level, and keep weight on the balls of the feet. Lower the chest toward the ground and bend elbows to 90 degrees. Press back up, maintaining body alignment.

Tip: Keep hands high enough to prevent the straps from rubbing against the arms during the exercise. Keep chest lifted to avoid rounding at the shoulders.

Why: Strengthens chest, triceps, shoulders and core.
Do: 45sec



2 CRUNCH

How to: Use a mid-calf strap length. Kneel facing away from the anchor with both feet in the foot cradles and align the hands under the shoulders. Lift knees off the ground, raising the hips slightly, and bring the knees into the chest. Maintain body alignment at fully extended start position.

Tip: Contract abdominals and lift hips slightly for a deep knee tuck.

Why: Strengthens core and lower body and provides a cardiovascular challenge as tempo and reps increase. Increased core stability challenge makes moves more intense.

Do: 45sec





3 LUNGE

How to: Use a mid-calf length strap. Stand facing away from the anchor with one foot in the foot cradle suspended below the anchor point. Drop down into the lunge while reaching back with the suspended leg and lowering the front knee to 90 degrees. Drive up through the front heel.

Tip: Keep heel on the ground and fully engage leg and glutes.

Why: A hands-free lunge that challenges unilateral leg strength and core stabilisation.

Do: 45sec

4 MID ROW

How to: Use a short strap length. Stand facing the anchor, lean back with arms straight with palms facing each other. Squeeze shoulder blades together keeping the elbows at 45 degrees from your sides whilst moving the body towards the anchor point. Return to start position, maintaining body alignment.

Tip: Draw shoulder blades in close together without shrugging shoulders.

Why: This exercise strengthens the back muscles in a different position to the "high" or "low" row version for complete strength development.

Do: 45sec



5 PIKE

How to: Use a mid-calf strap length. Kneel facing away from the anchor with both feet in the foot cradles and align hands under the shoulders. Lift knees off the ground, keeping legs straight and raise hips upwards. Maintain alignment at fully extended start position.

Tip: Keep the pike position strong by activating the quadriceps and avoiding bending knees.

Why: This intense move requires the upper body and core stabilisation to strengthen abdominals and shoulders.

Do: 45sec



6 PLANK

How to: Use a mid-calf strap length. Kneel facing away from the anchor with both feet in the foot cradles, and align hands under the shoulders. Lift knees up off the ground. Maintain body alignment from head to toes.

Tip: Keep shoulders pulled back and core engaged to keep back from sagging.

Why: Builds strength and endurance in the shoulders and core.

Do: 45sec hold equals 1 rep. Rest for 15sec & repeat

7 POWER PULL

How to: Use a mid-length strap.

Stand facing anchor, holding the TRX with one hand. With the free hand reach toward the anchor, following the main strap direction. Pull back the other arm into a high row, keeping weight on the heels. Drop the free hand down and back, let the eyes follow the hand, rotating through the core and maintaining body alignment. Return to start position, focusing on rotational movement. Swap arm positions each set.

Tip: Drive the movement from the back and core without turning it into an arm dominant exercise.

Why: This exercise provides a large range of motion that integrates back and core rotational strength and control.

Do: 45sec



8 SINGLE LEG SQUAT

How to: Use a mid-length strap. Stand facing anchor, keep the elbows under the shoulders with palms facing each other. Centre the working leg to the anchor point and extend opposite leg in front. Drop tailbone towards the floor and drive up through the heel.

Tip: Keep the heel on the ground for full leg and glute activation

Why: Allows for a greater range of motion by utilising the TRX for balance.

Do: 45sec

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How to be an ultra runner

Anyone can run ultramarathons – and much of the enjoyment is in the preparation, says Shane Benzie

MANY RUNNERS ARE intimidated by the idea of ultramarathons – going beyond the classic 26.2-mile distance. "But they really shouldn't be," says ultramarathon coach Shane Benzie, from Running Reborn.

"Understandably people look at the distances involved and feel daunted. But with the right training, anything really is possible." By training, Shane doesn't mean a torturous schedule of 200-mile weeks, rather, just some good, informed advice on equipment, nutrition and running technique. And that's exactly what he gives on his popular, day-long Multi Day Ultra Event Coaching courses, which are aimed at beginners but also those like me who've run a few ultras and want to get better at it.

Around 15 of us meet in a function room at a Crickhowell pub in the Brecon Beacons, to listen and learn. And it's enlightening stuff...



THE EXPERT

Shane Benzie is a running technique coach and movement specialist working with coaches and athletes in the UK, Ethiopia and Kenya. He's completed numerous ultras, including the Marathon des Sables and the 145-mile Great Union Canal Race and teaches Multi Day Ultra Event Coaching courses, which cost from £175. Shane also organises the T60, T100 and T184 races along the Thames Path, runningreborn.co.uk

PSYCHOLOGY

Shane says: "An ultramarathon is any running event longer than 26.2 miles. But ultras can take many forms. From just 30 miles on flat terrain up to multi-stage events such as the Marathon des Sables, continuous single-stage events that provide food and drop bags at aid stations and unsupported races where everything except water is carried by the runners – such as T184. Some events require navigation.

Understandably people look at the distances involved and feel intimidated, but with the right training, anything really is possible. I've worked with people who've only run a 10K previously and they go on to cover extraordinary distances, and more importantly, loved doing it. If runners have the correct equipment, nutrition, hydration and running form they are capable of amazing running achievements.

The two key things in terms of having the right psychology are simply to open your mind to what you might be capable of – and to realise that planning your ultra is 50 percent of the challenge. Once you're at the startline properly prepared you're halfway there already."



FEET

Shane says: "You'll be on your feet for a long time, so look after them. As with all parts of your body, think about prevention rather than cure. One of the biggest causes of first-time ultra drop-outs are blisters. They tend to happen as a result of friction and that's more likely when your feet are hot or wet. Look for comfortable socks that fit snugly, and turn them inside out: so knots and threads are on the outside. Don't wear socks made with any cotton, because it holds up to 14 times the amount of moisture of man-made fabrics. And the same with underwear – it'll save you a fortune on Sudocrem!

Take your socks off at every opportunity. Let them air and dry – it will make a huge difference. And deal with hot spots straight away. Some people put powder on their feet, others cream or Vaseline, some tape them up – but if you do the latter make sure you use a tape that breathes. Take out the insoles of your trainers to see where hotspots and friction are likely to occur and address accordingly. I've seen runners wear brand new trainers for ultras – don't do this, or in fact start out with anything new. Try everything out beforehand, several times."

EQUIPMENT

Shane says: "You can get away with mistakes with kit or hydration on a half marathon, but in an ultra you're much more likely to be found out. And there's more kit to think about. The planning stage is very much part of the overall challenge.

A good pack is as important as good shoes. You need a bag that's big enough to carry the mandatory kit list – this varies from race to race but invariably includes some first aid, food, a water-carrying system, a waterproof and perhaps spare layers. It should be lightweight and a good fit is crucial – I'd recommend you get a slightly heavier one that fits well, rather than the other way around. Try the pack on in a shop and ask staff to fill it with weight. And wear your pack in your training sessions so you're used to it.

You need to choose between a hydration bladder and bottles to carry water. A bladder will hold more water and its easier to carry, but you only know it's empty when you're sucking on air. Bottles allow you to have more than one type of fluid and you can gauge your rations.

Beginners often carry too much weight. Research every item, especially their weight.



There are lots of smart ways to save weight, such as decanting sunscreen into a smaller container rather than lugging a big bottle around planning how many calories you need, rather than just chucking a multi-pack of Snickers in your pack.

Clothing choices are usually very much personal preference, but again think light – the main concerns will be staying warm, dry or cool, depending on where your ultra takes place. Compression wear (leggings, T-shirts and so on) can make a huge difference to your muscles over a long distance, aiding both performance and, crucially, recovery. Sleeping in them has been shown to reduce inflammation and alleviate muscle soreness."

CHOOSING YOUR FIRST ULTRAMARATHON

The ideal beginner-friendly ultra would have good signposting (many are on official footpaths, some organisers will add markers), so that navigation skills aren't often needed. A shorter distance (60 miles or less) and moderate gradient will also seem more friendly – though gradient shouldn't be something to be frightened of as the ultra runner's dirty secret is that they will walk sections, especially uphill. Regular aid stations are also a boon, not just for the inviting smorgasboard of crisps and cakes but also the cheery faces and words from endlessly wonderful volunteers.

If you want to recon parts of the route beforehand – part of the ritual for some ultra runners – you might want to pick one that's not the other side of the country too. Findarace.com is a useful resource for finding races – of all distances.



RUNNING FORM

Shane says: "We want to run in the most energy efficient and least-likely-to-cause-injury way possible – which happens to be the most natural way, too."

Get your arms into good habits and your legs will follow. Position them at right angles, close to the body, push them back and let them swing forward naturally.

Heel-striking increases knee impact by up to 12 times your weight with every step. So it's better to go for a mid-foot contact, so the feet work as natural shock absorbers and the "spring" aspects of the leg muscles and joints work optimally to propel you forward with the least effort. In terms of push-off, when you transition into another stride, your foot should peel off the ground rather than rely on toe push-offs.

The quicker your feet move the less time they spend on the ground, the less energy you're using, the less likely injury is. In terms of your upper body, stay upright as much as possible. Use your skeleton by running tall, with feet rotating underneath to help maintain a mid-foot contact and economical action.

To ensure good running posture follow these four simple steps before a run.

- 1.** Make sure your feet are facing forward, hip-width apart and centred on the ground.
- 2.** Lengthen your spine by putting your arms above your head and straightening yourself out. This will allow you to run nice and tall – you can even do this on occasions as you're running.
- 3.** Most of us have bad posture and need to engage our core – do this by levelling your pelvis. Put the thumb of your right hand in your belly button and the back of the other hand in the small of your back and level the pelvis – doing so also engages your abdominal muscles.
- 4.** We are looking for a nice straight line from ear to shoulder to hip to knee to ankle. If you can't see the knot on your shoelaces, tilt yourself from the waist slightly until you can. However, unless the terrain is unstable, don't look at your feet when you run, keeping your chin up will keep your posture up."

NUTRITION AND HYDRATION

Shane says: "Of all the things you can take risks with and get away with, water isn't one of them. Most events will supply you with water in some way, usually at aid stations. But you should add electrolyte tablets as they replace sodium and potassium, which is vital. I've tried ultras just using water, and I've felt a big negative difference."

Dehydrated food, such as that made by Adventure Food (adventurefood.com), is ideal as the weight to calories ratio is good and the breakdown of carbohydrates, protein and fat is taken care of. These can be eaten after adding hot or cold water. Warm food is great for morale, but you may be using up valuable time heating it, so cold water can be quicker.

Typically, men should take on at least 2,500 calories though it may differ for each person. You will also need energy snacks – usually bars and gels. Eat these foods during training to see what works best, and understand how it feels to run on a full stomach. Also check what will be supplied at the event."



When running most of us have bad posture and need to engage our core – do this by levelling your pelvis.



NAVIGATION

Shane says: "Some ultra events need navigation. The biggest mistake is to go from map to ground, rather than ground to map. Look at the ground first and fit it to the map, otherwise you may make things fit in your mind when in reality they don't. Look for natural handrails to guide you, such as edges of woods or fields, ridges, roads, paths or rivers. Look at contours, too. Sometimes what looks like the longest route is actually the quickest route if it has fewer contours in the way.

When visibility isn't good, move on a bearing. Align your compass on the map from where you are to where you want to go. Then turn the compass housing so the lines inside it are aligned with the grid lines on the map. Remove the compass from the map and holding it turn your body so the needle lines up with north on the housing. Add two degrees, then follow the direction of travel arrow.

The longer the distance the more likely you are to wander off the bearing's invisible line though, so try 'spotting'. Pick an object in your line of travel, say a tree, and head for that. Then pick another one and so on."

VOX POPS

STEVE COX, 58, vice-president software company

"I returned to running a year and a half ago after a five-year break, because of an injury I couldn't get rid of. I joined a running club and read Chris McDougall's *Born To Run* and decided I wanted to do an ultra. It's become a bucketlist thing. I'm always competing with myself, always pushing myself. If I can do something at 11-minute/miles, tomorrow I want to do it in 10-and-a-half. Recently I did a technique workshop with Running Reborn that transformed my running. I knocked half a minute off my miles instantly. I'm doing things I couldn't do before. Now running an ultra feels like a reality."

LIZ SERCOMBE, 37, MD of a human transformation consultancy

"I run on the South Downs with my brother, who's an ultra runner. I didn't believe running ultras was possible for me – I was intimidated by hills. But I've been getting fitter and he encouraged me to sign up for the Original Mountain Marathon. But their website says, "On no account should you attempt this race unless you have previous experience!" So I signed up for this course. I love running and I love being outside, but I've never run long distances. I'm put off by roads. But I realised there are these events where there's a lot more to it and are much more interesting."

PAUL ALI, 41, project manager

"I played football for many years, but a broken ankle made me look for a new challenge and brought me to running. I've met some great people, run some fantastic courses and I have recently stepped things up, completing the Thames Ring 250, coming fourth in the Grand Union Canal Race and completing Spartathlon. I'm on this course to fine-tune things such as running form and navigation. Running keeps me fit, healthy and I enjoy the challenge. The ultra running community is very welcoming. I also enjoy putting together *Ultra Tales* ezine – it's my way of contributing something towards the community."

Extreme Triathlons

There's no doubting the rise of the so-called "Extreme Triathlon". Over ten years ago, Norseman paved the way for what is now a seemingly ever increasing number of races, with Celtman, City to Summit, Wasdale X and the Brutal being just some of the now many UK based. Elsewhere in Europe several countries are keen to get on the act too with Austria and Switzerland having notable additions to the calendar. Even Cyprus is keen not to miss out with its inaugural Olympus Man in November. So what does it take to give these races a go? Are they really so much more difficult than "normal" ironman races?

Words Sean McFarlane Pictures Stephen Ashworth





THEY CERTAINLY GO on for a long time. Celtman's winning time is close to 12 hours with Wasdale's just under a whopping 14. It is safe to say they are no mean feat, but the online forums are still littered with tales of what appear to be every-day competitors not only giving these races a go but also completing them.

WHAT DOES IT TAKE? So what does it really take to actually complete one? Breaking it down into disciplines, the swim may be by far and away the shortest of the three but it does often seem to be a big concern for many. Seriously cold water is certainly an issue at some races, particularly Celtman. That should never be taken likely but like so many things you can train to cope with it. Distances vary as several races have shortened their swim distances due to water temperatures, although of course you should always expect to be swimming the full distance and train accordingly. For many of those who decide to give these races a go, big days out are something that they're used to, but swimming tends not to be an area they particular excel at. As a result, the swim leg does have a "just get it over and done with" feel to it. Treating it just as that is really missing a trick though, and some if not all of the locations involved are staggeringly beautiful.

The bike legs are invariably long – at least ironman distance if not longer – and not flat. For me, the bike leg is the key physical challenge in these races. Provided you can cope with the environment, you don't need to necessarily do a great deal of swim training. In terms of running you can get away with not as much training on that front as you might think. However there's no substitute for having a decent base of solid and long distance biking in your legs come race day, particularly if you want to make the cut-off times involved. I wouldn't consider helping someone train for an extreme triathlon unless they were able to commit to a good amount of bike training. Bike choice is also very important. You need to be as comfortable as possible and make a decision on your race bike well in advance of race day. Time trial bikes should be seriously considered, and I'd be reluctant to see anyone not at least using triathlon bars. That all said comfort is paramount.

Then there's the run. I suspect - in fact guarantee - that no competitor in the history of extreme triathlons has not walked parts of the run. So be fully prepared to walk for sizeable

sections – you're in good company. Your mental approach is now more important than ever and you should divide up the run into several shorter races. All the run courses lend themselves very well to that, as they have distinct and separate parts. They usually involve some pleasant trail running, road running and of course mountains. More than ever the old phrase about how to do a long distance race of any type applies – "it's like trying to eat an elephant – you need to cut it up into manageable chunks". Do just that.

The hugely varying nature of the run is the key conundrum that you need to consider properly. For many this variation puts these races onto a far more challenging level than other ironman races. But in order to complete an extreme triathlon you have to view this differently. The mountain stages involve different muscles, or at least place a different emphasis on the muscles you have been using. So plain and simple they allow you at least some form of recovery, and afford you the ability to find renewed energy, giving you a very welcomed second wind. If possible you should try to do some training which replicates this - bike run sessions where the run has two or more distinct aspects to it work well. But make no mistake – you don't need to do a huge amount of long distance running on tough terrain to take these races on.

NUTRITION Unsurprisingly, nutrition is vital. Given the length of time involved, I would steer most people toward adding a good deal of real food into their race day diet. There's obviously the optimum nutrition you should be consuming but let's be blunt; few of us get that right, so for me put very simply it's better to get something down your throat than nothing, as long it stays in you for a decent time! That means real food, within reason, should be on the menu. It's amazing what so many people can do if they fuel up properly. Avoid if at all possible what I would class as "last resort" nutrition like chocolate and crisps, but if you have to, shovel it in. I like to have small pots of creamed rice and custard in the transitions.

TRANSITIONS Transitions themselves also need plenty of thought and consideration. Most competitors take much longer than usual in them to make sure they have everything for what is always a sizeable and very challenging next stage. But timing is still important, with cut-offs and placings often coming down to a matter of seconds, so it's important to move through transitions with reasonable haste. Good preparation is the answer so doing dry runs in training makes a lot of sense.

At the end of the day, these races are essentially about time on your feet; a lot of time on your feet. Those who do best simply slow down the least. It's big diesel engine stuff and most of you have one – you just might need to dust it off.

ABOUT SEAN MCFARLANE

Sean has competed in 14 ironman races – seven of which have been extreme. He's one of only three people to have done all four Celtsmans, and has been inducted into their hall of fame as a "Special Celtman". Sean also works with the organisers of the Wasdale X.



"I suspect, in fact guarantee, that no competitor in the history of extreme triathlons has not walked parts of the run."



Braveheart Tri Plan

Pulling it all together: plan 4

So the Braveheart, as sponsored by this magazine is getting closer, with its run up and down Britain's biggest mountain. You may be worried about your final preparations, well fear not as we provide you with the sharp end of our training programme.



SO FAR WE'VE taken you through the swim, bike and run legs of the Braveheart Triathlon. But of course triathlon is far from being a singular sport and it's the unique blend of the three disciplines that is so fundamental to its mass appeal. It also means that triathlon races demand an ability to effectively put those disciplines all together if you're looking to maximise your race performance. Many of us turn up on race day able to swim, bike and run well but forget to focus on how best to stitch the three together. That's a big mistake.

Hopping straight onto a bike for a 90km ride after a 1.9km chilly swim isn't everyone's cup of tea but for most this will present few if any

significant problems. Perhaps the biggest decision here will be clothing. Those looking for speedy transitions may opt to wear most of their bike kit underneath their wetsuits but for me, I'll gladly take the extra minute or so in T1 to avoid starting the bike leg in wet clothing. It's very much an issue of personal preference and one to definitely experiment with prior to the race. For some the race day weather may play a part in the choice here but we're talking about October in the north of Scotland so I've already decided.

For those of you who are concerned about being able to bike effectively after the swim, I have two key pieces of advice. Firstly, once

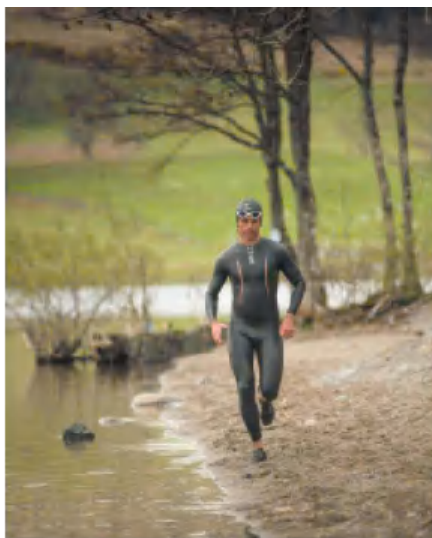
you're a few kilometres into the bike you'll have forgotten that you've even been in the water, so remember that. Secondly, unless you're a very experienced swimmer and have a clear swim strategy, focus on conserving energy during the swim leg and simply getting round the course. Many poorer swimmers batter away in the water and doing so has a negative effect on the rest of their race. Relax in the swim – you may well swim faster if you do – and aim to exit the water in good shape. Also do some swim-bike sessions in training.

Most first time triathletes, and indeed even the more experienced amongst us, struggle with running after the bike leg. More than any

other aspect of triathlon this is the main physical challenge I am repeatedly asked about. It's also why for me, in races such as the Braveheart, and especially longer extreme triathlons (see our article on page 70) it really is all about the bike leg. You are looking to be able to bike quickly whilst at the same time leaving enough in the tank to complete a very significant and challenging run leg. So use this last block of training to cement some really solid biking fitness.

You should now be looking to run after most of your bike sessions, even if just for ten minutes. There's no need to change into running kit if that in any way affords you an excuse not to do it. You'll be fine in your biking lycra. Don't take longer than five minutes in transition when training, unless you're planning on doing the same come race day. Your target here is to make your body as comfortable as possible with running straight after a bike. Come the third of October, many others won't be, so you can quickly put some sizeable distance on those other competitors from the start of the run. The next time you'll see them will be half way down Ben Nevis when they're going up. That's a great feeling and will give you an invaluable mental boost at a point in the race when you need it most.

At the end of the day, preparation is without doubt the key. You've trained to prepare your



body as best you can. Come race day don't panic if you feel you haven't trained enough – I'm sure even Alistair Brownlee thinks he could trained more. You are where you are. Prepare now for race day in its entirety. Race clothing, equipment and nutrition should now be both long decided and well-tested. If in doubt, stick to what you know works best for you. Mentally visualise all aspects of the course to lessen any potential shocks on that front. The water will be

cold, the bike long and the mountain tough. Dips during the race are inevitable, they come for a whole host of reasons so fully expect plenty of them. Good preparation should minimise the dips, but even very experienced triathletes have them; what sets you apart over others is your ability to deal with them and push on.

I would say good luck but luck should really have very little to do with it. You make your own. Finally, if you can, don't forget to enjoy the whole thing! Just remember the hoards of work colleagues, friends and family who would love to be doing the race – yes, they would. It's a celebration of your life that you're able to do something so awesome that so many others can't. Never stop appreciating that.

Your training plan for the next four weeks will be very much affected by how you chose to do the all-important "taper". I could write a book about tapering; many others have so, if you feel the need to head down to your local library and get into some detail here then do so. I would prefer that you simply do what suits your daily life and also what feels right. Some of you will have a long taper that may well take up most of the next four weeks whilst others may just carry on regardless and even train the day before. The correct balance is probably somewhere in-between.

More info, and how to enter,
bennevisbraveheart.co.uk



BRAVEHEART TRAINING PLAN 4

DISCIPLINE	GENERAL POINTS	SESSIONS	AIM	ALTERNATIVES
SWIM	Carry on with plenty of open water swim sessions. Air temperatures may be starting to cool down but the water is likely to be at its warmest over the next few weeks. Make sure you don't think open water swimming season is anywhere near over. You can finish with it on 3rd October.	Open water: you should now be able to swim the full distance of 1.9km. You don't need to do this distance much but you should ideally have done it at least twice pre-race.	Achieve comfort swimming the race distance in open water. Confirm any extra pieces of kit you plan on using for race day.	Any exposure to open water.
		Pool work: ongoing technique.	Don't forget to get in the pool and work on technique.	General conditioning work is ideal so fit that in when you can. Keep working on flexibility and continue to stretch.
BIKE	You should now have chosen your race day bike (many of you will have done this quite some time ago), and also have confirmed your nutrition. Having done so, you should train with both on at least a couple of occasions. Perhaps hold back on full race day nutrition in terms of the amounts involved but certainly get used to tastes and consistencies of any products you're using. Also ride a couple of times with any extra kit and tools you plan on using for the race. Continue to run at least once off the bike per week.	Steady distance: up to 95km on your race day bike and set up.	Race day familiarisation. Able to bike race day distance in relative comfort on your race day bike and set up	It's vital that you're comfortable on your race day bike. If using either a time trial bike or triathlon bars, get out on that set up and get comfortable. For most of you it's sufficiently different to make it an alternative session but it's exactly that difference that can cause problems during the race. So get used to it before.
		40/50km structured ride: Keep up the higher intensity sessions.	Finding the ability to change pace when needed for sustained periods. If using heart rate or power systems, confirm how that links to your output. If you don't have any such system, get familiar with how the world's ultimate machine copes and responds to changes in output – your own body.	
RUN	Last minute injuries tend to be caused by running. So carry on with good run training but first and foremost listen to your body.	Interval sessions/ structured 10-12km run: As before continue to do some quality sessions. If you have a particular session you enjoy, do that. It's OK to enjoy all this!	Make sure your race day shoes are now bedded in. Also be comfortable with your race nutrition and carrying systems.	Fit in whatever you can. Long walks are good but at this point injury avoidance is more important. The reality is that there's very little you can now do to significantly improve your fitness. But you can do a lot to really mess it up.
		10-15km off road: with challenging sections/1.5 hour hill run.	You should now be comfortable on off-road terrain. If you're not, don't worry though. You're better than you were.	
TAPER	Work back from race day. Most taper periods start with a few (maybe three) days of total rest then training picks up again but with a clear focus of building into the race. Reduce volume significantly – some say by as much as 80%.	Carry on with all three disciplines. Recovery is all-important so don't do anything which overly stresses your system. If you've been sticking well to the training plan a two-week taper should be fine.	Reach race morning fully rested whilst also making sure your body still knows very much how to do what it is about to. Ideally you should feel like a bit of a caged animal, raring to go.	Yoga, Pilates and similar sessions. Although relaxing, avoid the pub! For now.

Outdoor Fitness's training diary candidates have set themselves up to enter some mega events in the near future. There's a distinctly Welsh flavour to what's afoot.

TARGET: IRONMAN WALES

Ironmen

If you take three men that between them have destroyed knees, can't swim and hate running, then add a pint of beer; what would you expect the logical outcome to be? Err, enter Ironman Wales of course! So how are the guys doing?



RICHARD MANNING 47,
Richard is a design engineer
living in Llandeilo, South Wales.

I've spent a few days in Tenby determined to sort out my swimming. There was a really rough sea on the first evening but we all gave it a go. From the start I felt good and it just got better. I was really calm and relaxed and fell into a steady, comfortable stroke.

The next morning with the sea as challenging I completed a solo swim of 2km in 40 minutes – this was better than I could ever have hoped for. From the beach I jogged back to my van and changed (in a relaxed transition style) into my cycling gear. I then completed the Ironman loop for 70 miles in rain, wind and more rain – you've got to love August!

I then returned to the van and transitioned into my running gear for a very, very slow 4km around Tenby.

One Thursday I met with Colin for a high tide sea swim. He wanted to break 1.3 miles – we ended up doing 2.5 miles and both felt really good after – tired but confident.

After this short stay in Tenby my confidence has grown massively in the water, which is a huge relief. My cycling is still going well, with many miles being clocked up. So that just leaves me to carry on progressing my running.



HUW BENBOW 41,
Huw is the deputy head teacher
at Cleddau Reach Cc Primary
school.

Training has moved along pretty well over the last month. My swimming has continued to progress and I am still just swimming in the sea. Thankfully the jellyfish have thinned out, so close encounters are now quite rare in Tenby.

My nagging calf injury has continued to affect my running, but I have changed tack this month with my training. Rather than a couple of longer runs each week, I am now trying to run every day, sometimes only for a couple of miles. I feel that this is conditioning my legs to the running action more effectively, but time will tell!

My cycling has ticked along, and to be honest

I really haven't put enough miles in. I have enjoyed the rides I've been on – including the one I do each week with Tenby Aces, which is really helping me build speed.

With six weeks to go (at the time of writing), August 1st seemed a pretty good date to try a 70.3 Ironman event. I felt that this would be a good benchmark of my fitness, and hopefully highlight some key areas to work on in the run-up to the big one. My partner in crime for the day was my brother-in-law Neil Humphreys who is also an Ironman virgin!

The swim went really well, the lap took us pretty far out into the open sea, and even though the return leg was against the tide, my pace remained steady and I felt great.

I then entered T1 ready to tackle the bike section. The start was not as I had planned in my head, as 1.5 miles up Fishguard hill my heart sunk like a stone as I realised I had forgotten my timing chip. After returning to pick it up, the bike leg was actually pretty good; I picked off a fair few riders to complete 56 miles in 3 hours and 21 minutes.

The run was hideous – this sounds dramatic



but that's the best word I can use for it. My legs were not ready for it after the cycle, and it was really tough... really tough! However, 7 hours and 4 minutes after diving into the sea I finally finished. Many lessons were learnt and I will take this experience and use it to my advantage in the final weeks of training.



COLIN BARRETT 43,
Colin in a peripatetic brass
instrument teacher for
Pembrokeshire music service.

My training has taken a bit of hit due to work and family commitments but seems to be back on track now. I went to Lake Garda at the beginning of the school holidays with the local school orchestra. Although it wouldn't of been practical to take my bike along I took my running kit with every intention of getting at least three runs in. Well with two 30-hour coach journeys either side of a five-night stay, children to look after 24/7 and temperatures ranging from 36 to 42 degrees, running did not actually happen! However, as

soon as I arrived home in Tenby, I jumped straight back in to training for five days until I was off to Centreparks with the family. This time I was able to take my bike and running kit, and with some early starts managed to stick to my training plan.

Due to being away so much my swimming suffered and I was only able to get in the water twice in three weeks. Richard – as he mentioned – came down to Tenby for a few days one week, and this was an ideal opportunity to catch up, do some training and have a beer. All three of us went into the sea one Tuesday evening for a bit of a splash. It was quite rough and choppy, and not long in to the swim I managed to inhale water (again), and basically struggled. On the Thursday I met Richard and went for another swim determined not to inhale any water and to swim more than 1.3 miles, which was the most I had done up until then. The sea was calm, and with a few stops for a chat, we actually did 2.5 miles! We were both very pleased, as this was a mental and physical barrier that had now been broken.

With the event on the near horizon I'm getting very excited and nervous!

TARGET: BRECON ULTRA

Neil has had his preparations hampered by a knee injury and has been forced to adapt his training.



NEIL SPENCER, 34 lives in
Newport and is a former
soldier.

Well then my *Outdoor Fitness* readers, I bet you're wondering what I have been up to this month, in truth probably not as much as I should have.

Last month I attempted to complete two endurance events back-to-back in the Brecon Beacons. The first was the Fan Dance – a 24km timed race over two sides of Pen Y Fan, whilst carrying a 35lbs rucksack. This event was organised by the Special Forces Experience (thesfexperience.co.uk). After this I then went on to do my own challenge straight away, summiting Pen Y Fan as many times as possible in 24 hours. This, as you'll know from my past entry, didn't go so well. While making my way back up Corn Du my right knee started to play up – there was a grinding and crunching feeling on every step. I had to make the reluctant decision to call a halt to my second challenge.

So this month I have mainly been resting the knee, I'm on a waiting list for a specialist – hopefully it'll not be a too long wait. I have been taking anti-inflammatory tablets and have managed a couple of easy runs – just a couple of miles around my local park. To try to keep my fitness up and not stress the knee too much I have also done some group outdoor fitness classes. I've been training with a company called Be the Best Military Fitness (btbmf.com). So on Monday nights I've been along and met Graham and Adam – both former members of the Royal Engineers (Graham was actually a PTI for seven years). I've really enjoyed the workouts. After a 10-minute warm up we went into a series of burpies, press-ups, sprints and so on. This was followed by a short break, some team games and then a cool down. I hope to continue this type of training whilst my knee recovers and then up my training so that I'll be ready for the Cardiff half-marathon in October. I plan to run the course carrying a 40lbs pack in under two hours.

■ Neil is raising funds for:
Talking2minds and the Cystic Fibrosis Trust, you can donate at,
virginmoneygiving.com/NeilSpencerfandance

While making my way back up Corn Du my right knee started to play up – there was a grinding and crunching feeling on every step.

Ask the experts

From superfoods to fuelling a period of warm weather training, to the value of creatine use our experts have all the answers. Email your query to of.ed@kelsey.co.uk



RENEE MCGREGOR

LEAD SPORTS
NUTRITIONIST, UNIVERSITY
OF BATH, EATWELLFEELFAB.CO.UK

Q: There's been a lot on the TV recently about super foods - do they really exist, and if so, as a marathon runner, which would be of benefit to me?

Janet Lewis, by email

A: The term "superfood" has become a staple in our vocabulary; it refers to those foods that have been identified as being extremely high in a particular nutrient, which is thought to have a positive benefit to our health and performance. Celebrity endorsements, food bloggers and media claims (yes, even *Outdoor Fitness* uses the term) have led us to believe that such an item exists; so is it all just hype, a marketing play or is there some truth in what is claimed?

Indeed when you search for the evidence to back these claims, you will be hard pressed to find a research article that demonstrates that one specific food item can transform your health. As a nutritional professional, regulated by a governing body, all advice I provide needs to be evidence-based from an appropriate scientific background. So from that perspective, a superfood cannot exist – no individual food item is really able to provide all the components you need for a healthy diet. Additionally I feel this whole drive towards superfoods provides false hope – eating a punnet of blueberries can't offset that burger you chose to have at lunchtime.

That said, I do believe that individuals should aim to eat a "super diet" high in foods that when combined will provide a diet rich in nutrients and optimise good health, meaning that that cheeky burger no longer needs to be a guilty secret. No food should be off limits - but moderation, being mindful of choice, and portion size are all key for those wanting to follow a super diet.

When it comes to running there are several foods that appear particularly advantageous; beetroot, chia seeds, tart cherries and oily fish for example. So do they have a place to play in the runner's diet? To a certain degree, yes, due to their health and fitness promoting benefits.

Now, I've already mentioned that no one food can be described as a superfood; but that said by combining a diet high in nutrient dense foods, you can definitely aim for a super diet, which long-term can protect against certain diseases and, in the right combination and tailored to your training, benefit running performance.





I do believe that individuals should aim to eat a "super diet" high in foods that when combined will provide a diet rich in nutrients and optimise good health.



ANDY HAMILTON

SPORTS PERFORMANCE AND
NUTRITION EXPERT,
ANDREWMARKHAMILTON.CO.UK

Q: Is creatine of any use to endurance athletes?

Roger Simmons, be email

A: It's well established that creatine is beneficial for short, sprint activities. Most of the energy production in these short events will come from the creatine phosphate system. This system does not use any carbohydrate or fat, relying solely on the stored creatine phosphate in your muscles. However, since there is a limited amount stored in our muscles, fatigue occurs rapidly, usually in about 10 seconds. So the more you have stored, the longer you will be able to maintain all-out effort in a sprint or power event, that's why these athletes supplement with it.

As endurance events last much longer, creatine isn't of any great benefit. You are using a completely different energy system. For steady

state exercise, energy production using carbohydrate and fat broken down into glucose and fatty acids in the presence of oxygen dominates (your aerobic energy system) and is capable of keeping you going for many hours. During higher intensity bouts, such as a time trial or steep hill climb when you need more energy very quickly, you can by-pass the use of oxygen and produce energy anaerobically. In this system lactic acid is produced as a by-product, so you can't use this system indefinitely as it leads to fatigue.

Additional stored creatine will also lead to weight gain. Every gram of creatine stores additional water with it. Whilst this isn't such a problem for weight lifters, 100m sprinters and discus throwers for example, it is certainly less desirable for weight-conscious endurance athletes who have to move their body against gravity throughout their sport.



EMMA BARRACLOUGH

SENIOR SPORTS NUTRITIONIST FOR SCIENCE IN SPORT (SIS),
SCIENCEINSPORT.COM

Q: I'm heading off for a period of warm weather training - a week's cycling camp in Tenerife. I'll be training twice a day for 6 days, I generally only train once at home 3-4 times a week. Can you give me some nutritional tips?

William Brown, by email

A: To get through a training block where you are really stepping up from your normal volume, recovery is key. You will be depleting your glycogen stores every session, so you must keep replenishing these with carbohydrate in order to keep your energy levels up. Always try and do this within the 30 minutes immediately after your session. An easy way to make sure you do this is to take some sachets of your preferred recovery drink away with you, ready to mix in your bottle whenever you finish your training.

Unlike general healthy eating advice, high GI carbohydrate, which is released into your system quickly, is superior to lower GI carbs in this scenario. The added fibre in low GI foods is great for your diet and general wellbeing, but a high glycaemic response is desired in order to create an insulin response which will help to drive carbohydrate back into your muscles and liver stores.

High quality protein is also key. We are constantly breaking down and renewing our lean muscle mass, but during exercise this process is suppressed. Feeding protein that is high in the amino acid leucine in the 30 minutes after your



training session is the best way to kick-start the process of muscle protein synthesis again.

Keeping well hydrated can be a challenge during warm weather camps, especially with a lot of repeated back-to-back sessions. Using electrolyte drinks helps you to maintain fluid balance much better than water alone, and helps to replace the salts you lose as you sweat. If you are sweating a lot, drinking electrolyte tabs before and after your training sessions can really help. Also try and avoid alcohol if you are trying to perform to the best of your ability on your camp. As tempting as it maybe, you are on holiday after all, but alcohol will only dehydrate you and further deplete your glycogen stores.

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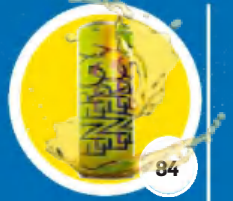
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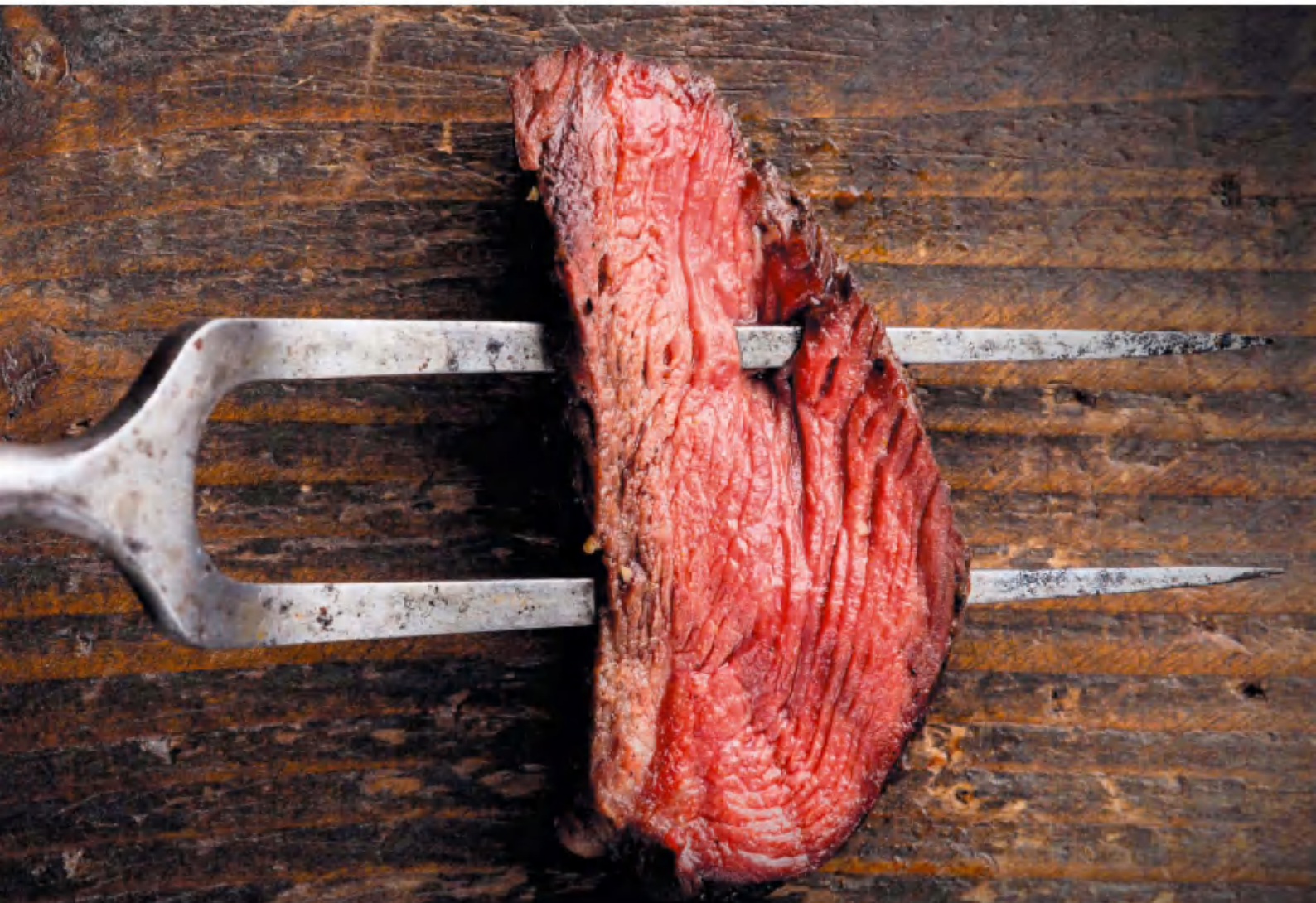
EXPERT NUTRITION ADVICE TO BOOST YOUR PERFORMANCE

FOOD



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Protein Power

ENDURANCE TYPES NEED protein – prolonged endurance activity can rob muscles of it (as it's used for energy). With reduced muscle you'll have less strength and power. You'll also have a diminished capacity to use carbs for fuel, and your recovery will suffer.

Proteins are given a bioavailability rating, marked out of 100 that indicates their level of inclusion of all the essential amino acids (amino acids are the building block of muscle). For example, eggs have a protein rating of 100 and fish 70.

Relatively low bioavailability would be indicated by a score under 70.

There are eight essential amino acids, which cannot be synthesised in the body, and 12 non-essential amino acids which can, provided sufficient quantities of the essential amino acids are present. The 20 amino acids can combine in a multitude of ways to promote hundreds of different protein types and have an equally numerous number of effects.

Leucine, an essential amino acid, for example, has been shown to assist

endurance performance. Good food sources include: soybeans, beef, salmon, peanuts and milk. Whey (from milk) is a particular good supplier. It's recommended that 5g a day of leucine is what's needed. Whey is also a rich source of glutamine (a non essential amino acid) and branched chain amino acids. These amino acids are great cellular energy sources, and leucine is particularly beneficial for stimulating muscle recovery and facilitating carb use for energy.

Sweet truths

Carbohydrate drinks

Genuine advances in sports nutrition are bit like politicians who actually say what they think – rare enough to count on the fingers of one hand. However, as Andrew Hamilton explains, recent research into carbohydrate nutrition has resulted in a new breed of carbohydrate drink that really does deliver improved performance. Maybe politicians should drink it too.

EVEN IF YOU'VE only a basic grasp of sports nutrition for performance, you'll probably already know that ensuring an adequate intake of carbohydrate during training and competition is absolutely vital for performance – especially during longer workouts where even a small carbohydrate shortfall can lead to a significant drop in performance. But why is carbohydrate so important?

The reason for this is simple; carbohydrate can be stored in the muscles as glycogen, which is broken down very quickly during exercise to provide large amounts of muscular energy for movement. While it's true that fat is a concentrated source of energy, and can also be stored in the body, it can't be broken down to release energy as rapidly as carbohydrate. This is because, burning fat for energy requires lots of oxygen and more intermediate steps to release that energy.

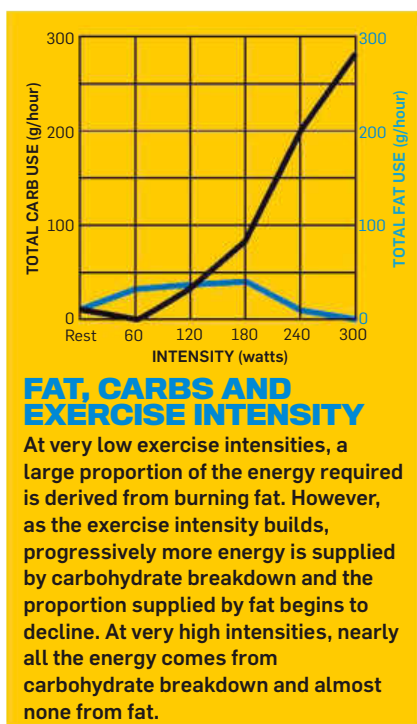
Of course, fat-burning is fine when you're working only gently and your muscles don't need to be rapidly supplied with energy. In a race, or hard training session however, you'll need ample available carbohydrate to enable your muscles to work much more intensely. Another reason why carbohydrate trumps fat as fuel for vigorous exercise is that (for short periods) it can be broken down to release energy even when there's no oxygen available – for example, a flat-out sprint to the line.

CARBOHYDRATE DRAWBACK There is however one major big drawback to using carbohydrate as fuel – limited storage. Unlike fat, which provides tens of thousands of stored calories of energy, your muscles can only store around two to two and a half hours' worth of glycogen for hard exercise – i.e. around 300-400g in total. Regular endurance training can help boost this storage by up to 50 percent, extending endurance by up to 20 percent before fatigue sets in(1-3), but the fact remains that your glycogen reserves are limited.

This explains why the human body runs a "dual-fuel" system. During gentle exercise, fat can be utilised almost exclusively for energy, which helps spare muscle glycogen. As the exercise intensity increases, the contribution to energy demand from glycogen steadily increases, until (when exercise becomes very hard) nearly all of the energy is being supplied from carbohydrate – see graph.

CARBOHYDRATE SUPPLEMENTATION

Given that stores of precious muscle glycogen are limited, it's natural to ask



whether ingesting rapidly absorbed carbohydrate during exercise can help offset the effects of muscle glycogen depletion, by providing working muscles with another source of glucose (the building blocks of glycogen). A number of studies carried out in the late 1980s and 1990s showed that carbohydrate drinks taken on the move can indeed prolong endurance.

Among the key findings were:

- Glucose carbohydrate drinks ingested during exercise can be oxidised (burned for energy) at a rate of roughly 60 grams per hour(4-6).
- This ingested carbohydrate becomes the predominant source of carbohydrate energy late in a bout of prolonged exercise (7), and can delay the onset of fatigue during prolonged exercise such as cycling, running swimming etc as well as improving power output(8,9).

The research findings have helped to shape the formulation of today's popular carbohydrate drinks. Most of these drinks supply energy in the form of glucose, at a concentration of around six percent (60g dissolved in 1 litre of water), to be consumed at the rate of around 1000mls per hour, so that around 60g per hour of carbohydrate

is ingested.

However, while these glucose-based carbohydrate drinks provided a means of boosting endurance, the maximum absorption rate of 60g per hour actually only amounts to around 250kcal of energy per hour – a modest replenishment of energy compared to that being expended during training or competition.

For example, a fit cyclist or triathlete can easily sustain an energy output of 900-1000kcal per hour during a race or sportive, around 800kcal of which would need to be provided by burning carbohydrate. This leaves a shortfall of at least 550kcal of carbohydrate per hour – a shortfall that has to come from limited and precious glycogen stores.

Consuming larger volumes of drink per hour or more concentrated drink formulations is not the answer because we know from studies that 60g of glucose per hour is the maximum the human body can absorb and utilise. Consuming more than that 60g of glucose per hour doesn't result in better performance – in fact it might actually harm it because of potential gastric distress.

IMPROVING CARBOHYDRATE DRINKS

In the mid 1990s, Canadian scientists were experimenting with giving carbohydrate drinks containing mixtures of two different sugars (glucose and fructose) to cyclists(10). In particular, the researchers wanted to see how well these mixtures were absorbed during exercise and oxidised for energy in the body. The key finding was that when the cyclists drank a 50/50 glucose/fructose mix, the amount of the ingested carbohydrate that the cyclists were able to use for energy production increased by over a fifth.

Then in 2004, a team from the University of Birmingham led by Professor Asker Jeukendrup published a landmark study(11). In this study, cyclists performed four exercise trials in random order while drinking one of the following drink formulations:

- 1.2 grams per minute of glucose (medium glucose).
- 1.8 grams per minute of glucose (high glucose).
- 1.2 grams per minute of glucose + 0.6 grams per minute of fructose (medium glucose/fructose blend).
- Water (control).

"Unlike many sports nutrition products, the scientific jury has considered the evidence for mixed glucose/fructose drinks and gels and delivered a clear thumbs up."



The key finding from this study was that the maximum rate of glucose absorption into the body was around 1.2g per minute - feeding more glucose in the high-glucose drink produced no more glucose oxidation. However, giving extra fructose did increase overall carbohydrate oxidation rates compared to feeding glucose only, which indicates that fructose in the glucose/fructose drink is absorbed into the bloodstream from the intestine via a different mechanism than glucose.

PERFORMANCE BENEFITS The study I've just quoted and others(12) show that glucose/fructose mixtures do result in higher oxidation rates of ingested carbohydrate, especially in the later stages of exercise. But what does this mean in terms of actual performance? Well, subsequent studies by the Birmingham team(13) showed that (compared to a glucose-only drink), 2:1 glucose/fructose drinks can result in:

- More energy produced from consumed carbohydrate (in drink) and less from stored muscle carbohydrate, thereby preserving muscle glycogen stores.
- Better hydration due to increased amounts of water absorbed from the stomach.
- A reduced perception of stomach fullness after consuming the same volumes of drink,
- Lower perceived rates of exertion in the later stages of exercise.

Even more importantly, the same team of researchers proceeded to carry out further research showing that a glucose/fructose combination drink does translate into better performance. Compared to a glucose-only drink, ingestion of the glucose/fructose drink resulted in an eight percent quicker time to completion of a one-hour cycling time trial compared with a glucose-only drink(14).

MORE GOOD NEWS More recently, a number of studies have confirmed that 2:1 glucose/fructose drinks do indeed result in better real world performance. For example, a New Zealand study investigated performance in cyclists who were either mountain bike racing or performing racing simulations in the lab (94 minutes of high-intensity intervals followed by 10 maximal sprints)(15). Compared to a glucose-only drink; the glucose/fructose drink substantially reduced race time, with cyclists recording on average a 1.8 percent

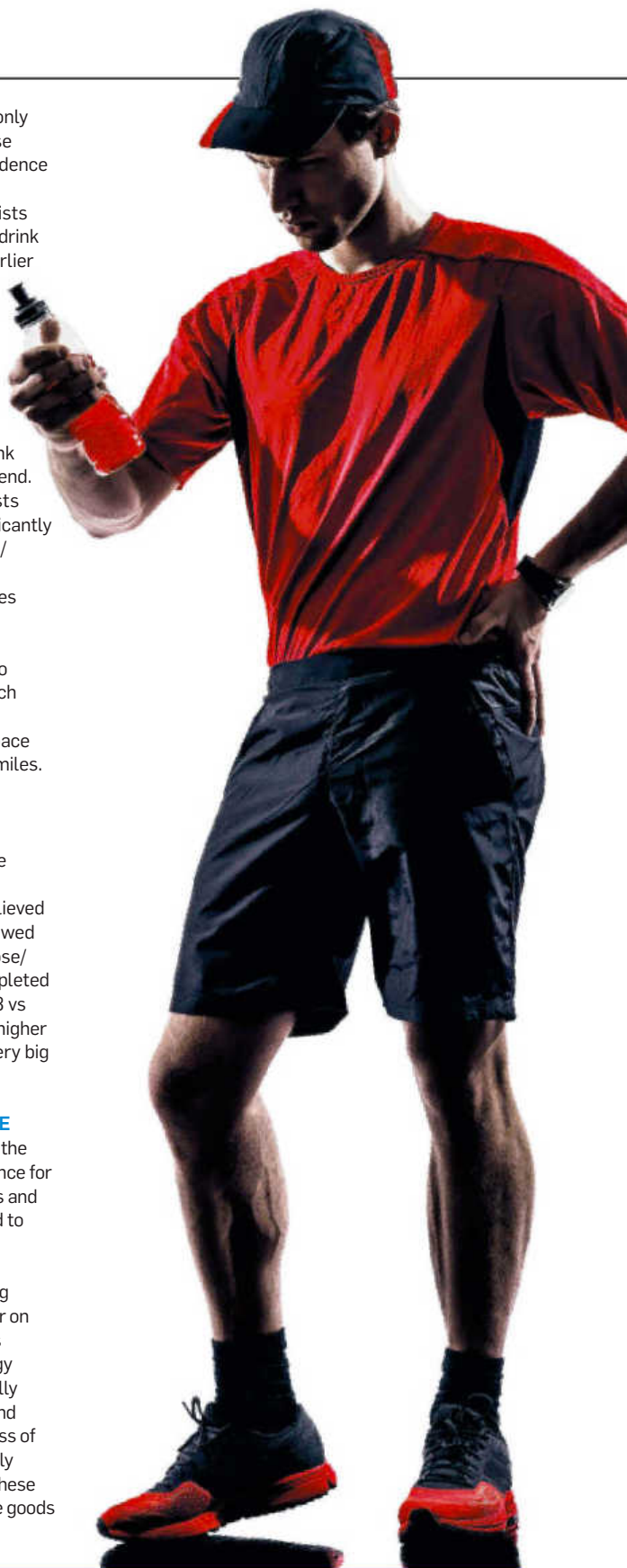
faster time compared to the glucose-only drink. Even better, the glucose/fructose drink resulted in a reduction in the incidence of abdominal cramps. It's also worth pointing out that in this study, the cyclists only consumed 70g per hour of either drink (as opposed to 108g per hour in the earlier studies). In other words, the glucose/fructose drink proved its superiority even at lower intakes.

In another study on competitive cyclists, the performance in two 100km cycling time-trials was compared(16). In one trial the cyclists drank a conventional glucose-only drink and in the other, a glucose/fructose blend. The results showed that all nine cyclists completed the 100km time trial significantly faster when they received the glucose/fructose beverage compared to the glucose-only drink (204 vs. 220 minutes respectively - i.e. 10% faster).

A further study looked at cycling performance in 18 trained cyclists who performed two separate trials(17). Each consisted of a two-and-a-half-hour endurance ride at a moderately hard pace followed by a flat-out time trial of 40 miles. In one trial, they consumed a glucose/fructose drink, which provided 60g of glucose, 30g of fructose (and 5mg of caffeine) per hour. In the other trial, the cyclists used their own self-selected nutritional strategy - one that they believed worked best for them. The results showed that when the cyclists drank the glucose/fructose plus caffeine drink, they completed the time trial eight minutes faster (128 vs 136 minutes), and with a significantly higher power output (212 vs 184 watts) - a very big improvement.

SUMMARY AND PRACTICAL ADVICE

Unlike many sports nutrition products, the scientific jury has considered the evidence for mixed glucose/fructose drinks and gels and delivered a clear thumbs up. Compared to conventional glucose-only drinks, a 2:1 glucose/fructose drink is better able to extend endurance during longer training sessions/races, and is likely to be easier on the tummy too. The same goes for gels (which are in effect concentrated energy drinks). Understand however, that to fully benefit from glucose/fructose drinks and gels, you need to be consuming in excess of 60g per hour of carbohydrate and ideally 70-80g per hour - because it's only at these intake levels that they really deliver the goods over glucose-only drinks and gels.



PRACTICAL PERFORMANCE TIPS

- For maximum energy replacement during hard racing, use carbohydrate drinks and gels providing a 2:1 ratio of glucose to fructose (60-80g per hour).
- During more moderate-intensity or shorter training sessions when carbohydrate demand is lower, you can use either glucose-only or glucose/fructose drinks and gels.
- If you regularly suffer from gastric distress when consuming carbohydrates on the move, use glucose-fructose drinks/gels at all times, which are easier on the tummy for a given carbohydrate intake.
- Bear in mind that most starchy foods (cereal bars, bread etc) supply mainly glucose, which will be absorbed less rapidly than a 2:1 product, and are therefore less effective for maximum energy replacement.
- Taking caffeine with your carbohydrate drinks/gels may enhance carbohydrate utilisation (allowing you to consume slightly more than 80g per hour), and also speed up recovery when added to post-exercise drinks.

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Everyday Elite Nutrition

Renee McGregor provides nutritional information to a host of athletes of all abilities from numerous sports, here she talks us through her role and provides much take-home advice.

The reason I enjoy my job so much is because every day is different. Some days I work with elite, national level athletes, other days I work with juniors within talent development squads. Sometimes I work with the members of a football academy, and on further occasions with recreational athletes - for example, those who do sport as a hobby, who often have a goal in mind, such as a marathon or an Ironman event. No matter whom I'm working with, the journey is a collaborative one that begins with the fundamental principles of good nutrition.

What's certain is that whether you're a novice or an Olympian, you need strong nutritional foundations that will enable the more detailed nutritional plans to work their proper magic. This will make you stronger, fitter and more able to meet your performance goals.

HEALTHY EATING VS SPORTS NUTRITION

The main difference between healthy eating and sports nutrition is the attention to detail

and the fine-tuning of nutrient delivery. In healthy eating, the ultimate goal is to promote long-term good health, and fend off increased risks of disease, while maintaining a balance, so that food is still enjoyable. In comparison, sports nutrition, although still based on healthy eating guidelines to an extent, is performance driven. It is about getting the best out of your training, whether that's running for 45 minutes three times a week or training to compete in an ironman event. Making the right nutrition choices to suit not only your specific sport but the intensity of that activity within your given training session will ensure that you have:

- 1 Put the right amount and type of fuel into your body to meet the demands of your session, allowing you to perform it to your best ability.
- 2 Made the correct choices after your training session, which will allow your body to adapt to your training and make it stronger within your chosen sport.

The key to good sports nutrition is preparation and organisation; fundamentally, to achieve your goal you need to tailor your nutrition to the exact training session. It's not just about energy in and energy out. I have lost count of the number of athletes who think they can get away with eating poor nutrient-dense foods just because of the amount of training they do. They may well maintain their weight and have the energy to train but what they don't see are the adaptations that they should. So what should they see? To a degree it will depend on the chosen sport but some general gain should be:

- Increases in strength and lean muscle mass.
- Improvements in performance within their chosen sport.
- Good consistency between training sessions so that each one can be done to the best of their ability.
- Good sleep patterns, good mood and high energy levels.



By just meeting energy demands, you may be able to carry out all your training but you may not see any actual improvements in your day-to-day training and overall performance.

Although so far what I have mentioned regarding sports nutrition is applicable to anyone with a performance goal, it becomes even more important when working with elite athletes. Helping them to periodise their nutrition around key competitions is vital for success.

Just as training needs to be adjusted to ensure that the athlete can train consistently well over several months without becoming injured or ill so too does nutrition. Even during relatively low intensity weeks, advice needs to be provided to maximise immune function, recovery and rest. Here's an example, for an athlete who has competed in a major event and is in an active recovery phase during their off season.

Although their training volume and intensity may be significantly reduced, their body will be at more risk of injury and illness. Good nutrition strategies therefore include; increasing protein requirements (frequency of protein rather than portion sizes at any given time); increasing intakes of fresh fruit and vegetables; foods high in essential fats and Vitamin E, such as seeds, nuts, oily fish and avocados; while carbohydrate intake will be reduced but not avoided completely. This ensures that we



maximise recovery post competition, rebuild immunity and help to decrease inflammation.

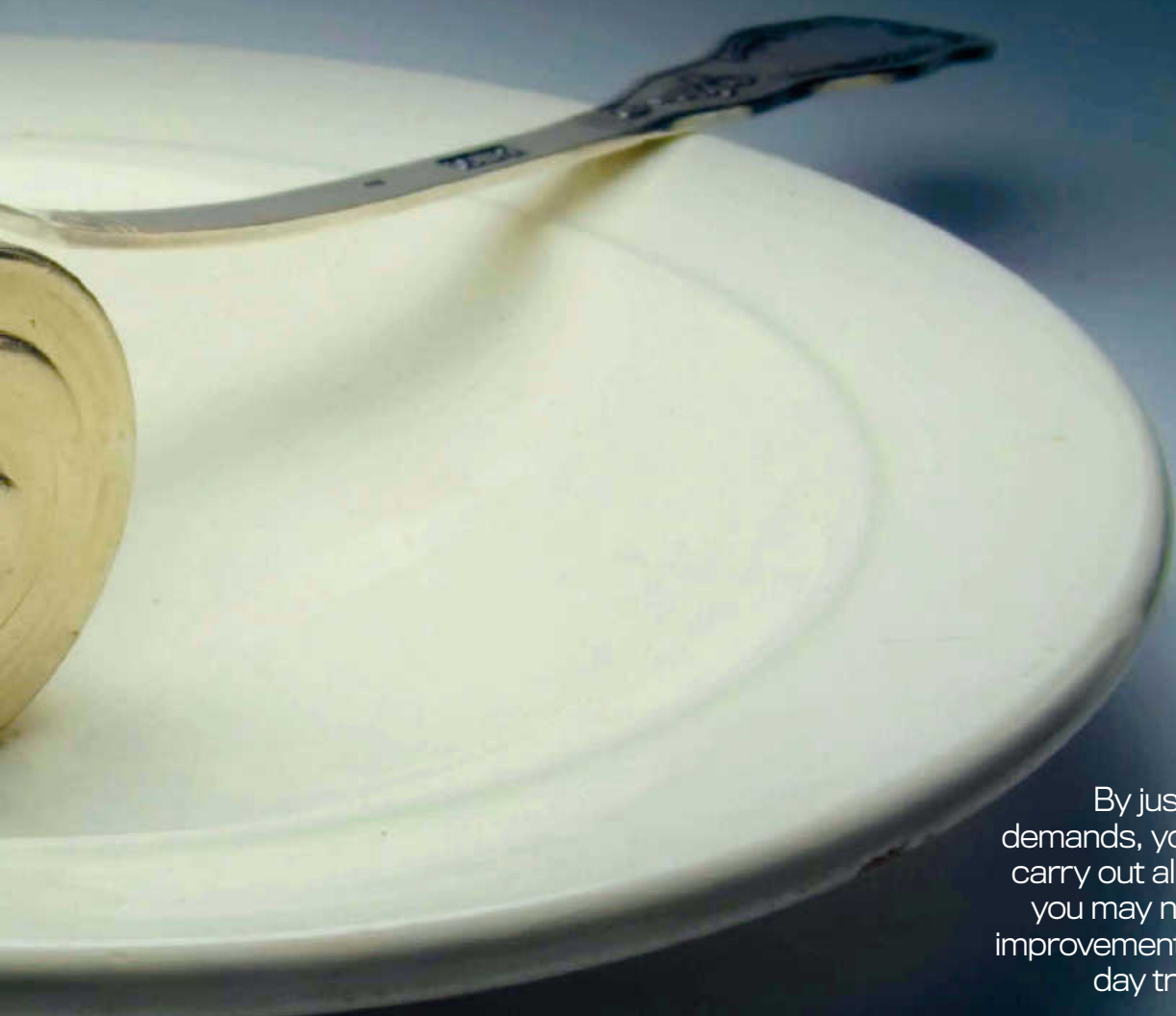
For female athletes particularly it is essential that during similar times, nutritional intake and body composition allow for regular menstruation. When working with elite female athletes, the ideal is to maintain regular menstruation function throughout the year. However it is inevitable in some cases and

sports that increased training volumes can lead to some irregularity. The aim will always be to prevent absence of three consecutive periods; if this is exceeded consistently low oestrogen levels can affect bone density, putting the female athlete at an increased risk of stress fractures.

The other key difference about working with elite athletes is that it tends to be a team effort; no matter which sport an athlete is specialising in there will be other elements of their training that will need to be addressed such as strength and conditioning, prehab and core strength as well as actual sport training. At the start of working with any athlete, I will attend meetings with coaches and discussions will be had, planning the year ahead. We will look at the competition calendar, training blocks and training camps.

In this way the whole team is involved, and it is a very important forum to be involved in. It not only highlights the key practitioners you may need to work with to achieve the specific goals of that athlete but it also helps me to get some insight into the athlete, especially when I have not worked with him or her before. This helps me to consider my approach.

If it's a young athlete for example, who is living away from home for the first time, then I need to assess cooking ability as well as general nutritional knowledge. In these cases it may be



By just meeting energy demands, you may be able to carry out all your training but you may not see any actual improvements in your day-to-day training and overall performance.

necessary to set up supermarket tours and cooking workshops initially. Once good nutritional practices have been established I would then look to work with the training plan.

Similarly it's possible that an athlete, who has been around a while, has worked with nutritionists in the past, can still be struggling with recovery or recurrent injury. In these cases it is important to do a full assessment, looking for potential clues as to why. It may also be necessary to work alongside other practitioners such as physiotherapists and a sports psychologist to get to the bottom of the issue.

On other occasions, especially with female athletes, coaches often prefer it if I - as a female nutritionist - feedback regarding body composition goals and help the athlete achieve what is necessary for their sport.

Some sports such as tennis and rowing require athletes to travel a great deal and there is often much work to be done to encourage good nutritional choices while they are abroad. It helps if an athlete has been to a place before as we can start to think about what's available from local supermarkets, hotels they might be staying on or restaurants. It may also be necessary to advise on what food items they can take with them, especially if travelling to remote areas where it is difficult to know what



you will be eating.

The other major area I tend to cover with elite athletes which is not such a huge problem with recreational athletes is that of anti-doping. There are some key messages that need to be provided to ensure that the athlete is always making informed choices and not putting their performance at risk. The key difference will

come with supplements and sports products; it's helping the athletes to firstly assess a need. If it is seemed necessary for the use of a protein shake, or vitamin supplement for example, the next step is advising on suitable places to purchase these from. The local supermarket, pharmacy or online retailer is not sufficient as there is a possibility that their products could have been tampered with and contain prohibited substances that the athlete will not be aware of. For this reason as a sports nutritionist it is my responsibility to ensure that all products being used by the elite athletes I work with are batch tested and a relevant certificate is produced to support this. This just provides some reassurance to the athlete that in the unlikely event that they produce a negative test, we have some proof to say that we have done everything possible to ensure that we have used safe products (see nutrition supplement in OF 45, for more info).

So whether working with an elite or recreational athlete, my aim is always to help ensure nutrition is tailored to training loads, intensities and volumes for maximal performance gains. However, when working with the elite, there are additional considerations and discussions within a wider team necessary for the same outcome.

The other major area I tend to cover with elite athletes which is not such a huge problem with recreational athletes is that of anti-doping.



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Flaxseed Your King demands you must eat it!

It might not be the most fashionable superfood, but when it comes to proven health benefits, flaxseed is definitely one of the very best. Andrew Hamilton explains why.

WHEN CHARLES THE Great ruled most of Western Europe in the early middle ages, so convinced was he about the health benefits of flaxseed, he passed a decree requiring all his subjects to consume it! A bit extreme perhaps, but recent scientific studies suggests that he really was onto something because there's growing evidence that flaxseed can help reduce the risk of heart disease, cancer, stroke, and diabetes.

WHAT IS FLAXSEED?

Flaxseed (which is also called linseed) is one of the oldest cultivated crops. Indeed, flaxseed was cultivated in Babylon as early as 3000BC, and is also known to have been cultivated in ancient Egypt and China. As the name suggests, flaxseed consists of small, oval-shaped seeds, which range in colour from light golden brown to a darker, more reddish brown. These seeds are an extremely rich source of nutrients, including dietary fibre, vitamins, minerals and the essential fatty acid known as alpha-linolenic acid (ALA). ALA is also more popularly known as omega-3. Each tablespoon of ground flaxseed contains about 1.8 grams of omega-3.

Omega-3 essential fatty acids are an essential component in the diet (because your body can't make them). In particular, omega-3 fatty acids are known to have heart health benefits – for example, lowering blood cholesterol and helping to reduce blood pressure. There's also growing evidence that omega-3 fats can help normalise blood sugar (so helping to reduce the risk of blood sugar swings, or worse – diabetes), and help control inflammation in the body – e.g. reduce pain and stiffness in conditions such as arthritis. And as if these benefits weren't enough, increasing numbers of studies show that omega-3 fats are vital for brain health, helping to reduce the risk of depression and cognitive decline.

Given the evidence above, it's perhaps not surprising that omega supplements (e.g. flaxseed oil) are so popular with consumers. However, while flaxseed is a fantastic source of

FLAXSEED: NUTRITION FACT FILE

Nutritional value of flaxseed per 20g (2 tablespoons)*

- Energy 54.7kcal
- Dietary fibre 2.8g (DV = 11%)
- Total fat 4.3g
- Polyunsaturated fat (of which the bulk is omega-3) 2.9g
- Protein 1.9g
- Vitamin B1 0.2mg
- Vitamin B3 0.3mg
- Vitamin B5 0.1mg
- Folic acid 8.9 mcg
- Calcium 26.1mg
- Iron 0.6mg
- Magnesium 40.2mg
- Potassium 83.3mg
- Zinc 0.4mg

*Source: USDA Nutrient Database

omega-3, it actually offers a lot more. In addition to omega-3, flaxseed is also rich in natural compounds called lignans. Lignans are one of the major classes of phytoestrogens, which are estrogen-like compounds with antioxidant qualities, able to scavenge free radicals in the body and so help reduce free-radical induced cell and DNA damage, which is linked to aging and degenerative diseases such as cancer. Flaxseed is considered to be one of the very best sources of lignans (0.3g of lignans per 100g of flaxseed), containing around 75 to 800 times more lignans than other plant foods.

The health benefits don't stop there either because flaxseed is also rich in soluble and insoluble fibres. The soluble fibre is able to dissolve in water in the digestive tract, creating a gel-like substance, which helps to lower blood cholesterol and glucose levels. The insoluble fibre meanwhile absorbs water, which



adds bulk to the digestive tract and helps to move things through quickly, keeping the colon healthy and reducing the risk of conditions such as colon cancer.

WHOLE SEED AND NOTHING BUT THE SEED

If you've read this far, you'll hopefully see that to reap the most benefits from flaxseed, you need to eat the whole seed and not just take flaxseed oil supplements (healthy as these are). Eating whole flaxseed is nothing new actually as small amounts of flaxseed are added to a number of foods (e.g. crackers, breads, cereals and so on) that can be purchased in the supermarket. However, to consume useful amounts, it's a much better idea to buy pure flaxseeds and use it in your own recipes. It's also worth adding that to ensure you get the full benefits, you should ideally eat ground flaxseed because whole seeds can sometimes pass through the digestive tract undigested.

USING FLAXSEED

There are loads of ways to enjoy flaxseed. Eaten on its own, flaxseed has a light, nutty taste, which goes well with both sweet and savoury dishes. So for example, you can sprinkle flaxseeds on salads, add flaxseeds to fruit yoghurt, use them in a nuts and raisins mix – the list is endless. Another great

way to use flaxseed is to add ground seeds when baking for example, flapjacks. The flaxseed adds a nutty taste and will also boost the protein, fibre and omega-3 content of your flapjacks. The recipe right for flaxseed muffins shows just how easy it is to make a tasty, healthy snack using flaxseed.

RECIPE: FLAXSEED MUFFINS

If you want a super-quick way to enjoy flaxseed, here's a healthy, high-protein recipe that can be knocked up literally in a few minutes:

INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup of ground flaxseed
- ½ teaspoon baking powder
- 1 tablespoon of honey
- 2 teaspoons of cinnamon powder
- 4 eggs
- 1 tablespoon of olive oil

DIRECTIONS

Mix all ingredients into a bowl and then divide equally into four coffee mugs. Microwave at full power for three and a half minutes. Remove from mugs, allow to cool and spread with butter. Also works well as a savoury muffin – just omit the honey.



"...omega-3 fatty acids are known to have heart health benefits - for example, lowering blood cholesterol and helping to reduce blood pressure.."

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AVOID THE RISK of your GPS, phone or action camera dying mid-expedition with this instant power source. The Crankmonkey relies on human power to generate electricity, so there's no need to rely on extra battery packs or the sunshine powering solar panels to recharge devices.

A 10-minute wind of the handle generates enough electricity to power a headtorch for 6-7 hours, or deliver 20 minutes of talktime for an iPhone 6.

The Crankmonkey connects via a micro-USB, weighs just 346g, and comes with a lifetime guarantee.

BACKPACKING EQUIPMENT

Turn your day in the outdoors into a weekend adventure with our guide to tents, mats, sleeping bags, stoves and more essential kit



Nights under canvas

Extend your adventures into overnight expeditions with a lightweight tent

1 THE NORTH FACE O2, £275, thenorthface.co.uk

When a tent weighs less than half your sleeping bag, it's clear there's clever architecture and minimalist design at play. The O2 tips the scales at just 1.02kg, giving it instant weight-weenie appeal, yet it has withstood strong winds and heavy rain. While it's technically a two-man tent, you have to be on good terms with your partner because it's fairly intimate inside. At this weight and pack size, however, it's a great option for a solo trip, with room to sleep and to store your backpack alongside your sleep mat and away from the reach of the elements. The inner goes up first, followed by the tarp-style outer, so kit will get wet if it's raining. However, the O2 is swift to erect and the pegs are strong enough to hold the tension in the tarp, even if they're sharp against numb fingers. It was interesting to note too how insects swarmed and settled on the yellow end rather than the grey – if you want to avoid midges it's a guide to which colour to wear!

Verdict: Easy to carry, easy to erect and brilliant for solo trips, but a squeeze for two people.

Rating: ■■■■■■■■■■

2 VANGO SIROCCO 200, £180, vango.co.uk

The longer you spend at your camp spot, the more you'll come to appreciate the space the Sirocco offers. Not only is there proper room for two people to lie side by side, but the height (about 1 metre inside) amplifies the impression of size. Suspended side pockets help with the arrangement of kit, and the useful porch swallows a pair of backpacks and boots. Robust in the face of rugged Northumberland weather, the Sirocco took slightly longer to pitch than the O2, but the colour-coded poles helped, and second time around it was much swifter. On dry nights you could easily choose just to put up the inner (for insect protection) or the outer layer to keep off the dew. The reflective guylines are a thoughtful touch to avoid tripping campers at night, and the pegs have a welcome strength to them. It rolls up to 45x18cm and weighs 2.78kg, so it's not the lightest tent on the market, but split the tent between you and your hiking companion and neither of you will pay much of a weight penalty, with the bonus of a good-sized tent when you pitch camp.

Verdict: Great space for a genuine two-man tent

Rating: ■■■■■■■■■■

3 NIGOR DIDIS 2, £549.99, nigor.eu

Welcome to the tardis of the tent world. The Didis 2 is simply vast for a two-man tent – it offers so much space that we checked then double-checked that we had the correct model. From a competitive pack down size of 50x14cm it expands into a tunnel tent with a footprint that measures 165x430cm, yet it still weighs less than the Sirocco. The sleeping pod is a more modest 220x135cm but with its height in excess of 1-metre it feels spacious and the vents help to keep a breeze moving through and avoid condensation. It's the porch that's gargantuan though, at 175cm long and up to 165cm wide (it tapers to a narrower footprint). This creates a vast storage area, and while there's no groundsheet it's comfortably big enough for two people to sit in and eat, without encroaching on the sleep area. Pitching is straightforward with three colour-coded poles, and it erects as a single unit so there's no chance of the inside getting wet while you're putting it up. Split the weight between you and your backpacking buddy and you're onto a winner here, albeit at a hefty price.

Verdict: Astonishing levels of space for a two-man backpacking tent at such a low weight make this an exceptional tent.

Rating: ■■■■■■■■■■



Backpacking rucksacks

For multi-day treks you'll need a large volume rucksack to carry your gear and camping kit comfortably.

1 EXPED LIGHTNING 60, £130, exped.com

If you're a backpacker who cuts labels from your kit and drills holes in your toothbrush to save weight, you'll love this featherweight pack. It weighs just 1.15kg, which is less than half its rivals on this page, and if you're on a lengthy trek, your knees and ankles will welcome the chance to save a kilo every footstep. Features have naturally been cut to save weight – there's no lid, just a roll top, and there are only two open side pouches alongside a useful pocket on each of the hip fins. This works if you have the discipline to keep your kit organised inside in drybags; otherwise you risk a major muddle by day two of your expedition, emptying the pack to find what you need. In terms of carrying; the back length has impressive adjustability to suit different height hikers and the densely-padded hip fins proved comfortable on a trek along Hadrian's Wall with full backpacking kit (see page 36). We would, however, have appreciated more padding on the shoulder straps when just wearing a baselayer (it was less of an issue when wearing an extra layer). Keeping the features to a minimum means relying on the water-repellent fabric to protect your kit (a rain cover costs an extra £16.50), but when trekking through squally showers and cloud-covered hills, the Lightning kept our kit dry.

Verdict: An exceptionally light pack at a very keen price, but few features demand rigorous organisation of your kit.

Rating: ■■■■■■■■□□□

2 GREGORY BALTORO 65, £215, gregorypacks.com

This richly featured pack is the antithesis of the Exped Lightning, offering a vast array of pockets and practical design ideas for a commensurate gain in weight. It comes in three frame sizes (small, medium and large), which means less individual adjustment on each pack; the large was very big indeed so try before you buy. At 2.65kg it weighs more than two-and-a-half times the Exped, and the pay-off for the extra burden includes a twin-pocket lid (that also detaches to act as a bum bag), a zipped front pocket, twin side pockets and twin hip belt pockets. Top, side and bottom access to the main compartment makes finding your kit easy, and a good rain cover keeps your kit dry when the heavens open. Inside, there are even shoulder straps stitched to the sleeve for a hydration bladder so it can detach and serve as a temporary daypack to carry gubbins onto a flight while the main pack is in the aircraft hold. Where the extra weight works best to its advantage, however, is in the straps and back system, with an excellent no-slip lumbar support and generous padding on the hip fins and shoulder straps. If you have to carry a heavy load, this would be the most comfortable pack to take.

Verdict: With so many clever ways to sort your kit, this is ideal for lengthy expeditions, but its weight means it's better suited to heavier loads.

Rating: ■■■■■■■■□□

3 BLACK DIAMOND MERCURY 65, £180, eu.blackdiamondequipment.com

Switching packs mid-expedition to carry the Mercury proved a revelation thanks to its harness and hipbelt. The shoulder straps are linked to each other by a cable, so when one lengthens the other shortens, while the hip fins have a ball-and-socket pivot at the base of the spine so they pivot with every step. The combination of these two systems delivers tremendous freedom of movement and a more natural gait, especially on uneven terrain. One tester found the sensation unsettling, but the consensus was in favour of the more fluid, better-balanced walking. There's no adjustability to the length of the back system, however, so it's important to try before you buy in order to work out whether the medium or large frame size fits better (there's also the women-specific Onyx). The top and front openings to the main compartment make gear finding easy, and there's a large front pocket and good-sized pockets on the sides and hipbelts. It's also reassuring to see storm-sealed zips as an extra defence against the rain. At just over 2kg, it's a litre of water heavier than the Exped and 500g lighter than the Gregory, a Goldilocks midway position that seems to offer the ideal compromise. And when the temperature rises the wide channel between the back panel and grooved padding helps to stop your back getting too sweaty.

Verdict: Proved to be the comfiest pack to carry, and with useful storage is hugely practical for backpacking trips.

Rating: ■■■■■■■■□

Fancy a brew?

Whether you're boiling water for a cuppa or cooking a meal, the opportunity to have hot food and drinks can transform a backpacking trip.



1 COLEMAN F1 POWER PZ, £29.99, coleman.eu

This simple and strong stove screws directly to the top of a gas tank, and the arms lock out to create a more stable platform for a pan. This means you can cook or just boil water - although we failed to match the claimed 2:30 minutes time to boil a litre of water. There's no wind protection for the flame, but there is an automatic lighter and it does burn fiercely. At just 153g, and with its own carrying pouch, it's weight and its price make for a very effective way to enjoy hot food and drinks when camping.

Verdict: A great price for a reliable, effective stove.

■■■■■■■■■■

2 PRIMUS ETA LITE+, £110, primus.se

The burner, foot support and even a 100g gas cartridge pack away neatly into the aluminium pot that comes with this stove, making it easy to pack and stow. It's exceptionally efficient, burning like a furnace as the heat exchanger amplifies the effect of the flame, for a claimed boil time of 2:45 minutes for 0.5 litres (we managed it in 3 minutes). As a tall, narrow unit, it's better suited to boiling water for drinks and dehydrated food rather than cooking in the base of the pot, and its height means it needs to be level for safety. The see-through lid lets you keep an eye on cooking progress and the heat resistant sleeve adds insulation with a webbing handle, although pouring is still slightly awkward.

Verdict: Probably the quickest way to boil water we've ever used, but less suitable for cooking.

Rating: ■■■■■■■■■■

3 OPTIMUS POLARIS OPTIFUEL, £185, optimusstoves.com

The USP of this stove is its ability to burn LPG gas from a standard butane/propane canister or white gas, kerosene, diesel and jet fuel from a bottle without the fiddly task of changing the needle. While butane/propane is more than adequate for UK use (you can switch from an economy mode to winter mode by turning the canister upside down and holding it on the integrated support legs), if you find yourself on more remote expeditions the opportunity to refuel with whatever is available could be hugely useful, and more than justify its hefty price. The chunky stove doesn't come with a liquid fuel bottle, but it does include a self-cleaning needle and a self-purging pump for switching to bottled fuels. It's very stable, burns with a roar, has a claimed boil time of 3:40 minutes for 1 litre of water, when burning on white gas, yet proved flexible enough to simmer our pasta dinner. There's even an effective windshield for more efficient cooking.

Verdict: The option of multi-fuel use makes this ideal for remote adventures where replacement gas canisters are unavailable.

Rating: ■■■■■■■■■■





Sleep tight

Getting a good night's kip makes all the difference to a backpacking trip

1 VANGO VENOM 300, £160,
vango.co.uk

This down-filled sleeping bag packs up into its own drybag to occupy just 29x14cm of your rucksack, a low volume for such a generously sized bag, and it weighs only 850g. Its duck down insulation is ideal for Britain's summer temperatures, being comfortable to 5 degrees Celcius, and it was toasty warm on a damp trek along Hadrian's Wall in June as featured in this issue; you'll need to wear extra layers if the mercury drops to freezing though. The zip goes to waist-level and there's good width at the feet too, so your toes don't feel claustrophobic. Just remember to keep the down dry or it loses its insulation.

Verdict: Ideal for British summer treks.

Rating: ■■■■■■■■■■□□

2 MOUNTAIN HARDWEAR LAMINA 0, £145,
mountainhardwear.com

In early March I spent a night wild camping on Kinder Scout in the Peak District and failed to get a wink of sleep due to the perishing temperatures. How I wish I had the Lamina 0 for that mini-expedition. Its deep, synthetic insulation provides comfort down to freezing point, and if it does get a bit too warm the full length, two-way zip lets you spill heat. It is, however, twice the weight of the Vango and will occupy most of your rucksack due to its volume unless you invest in a compression sack to shrink its size.

Verdict: Extend your camping season into spring and autumn with this snugly bag.

Rating: ■■■■■■■■■■□□

3 COLEMAN SILVERTON 350, £39.99,
coleman.eu

A quick word of warning – if you're not good in the mornings, you'll find it very difficult to climb out of the Silverton 350. Its double layer insulation gives it a comfort score of -2 degrees Celcius, but the cost of this luxury slumber is a weight and volume penalty. The Silverton 350 tips the scales at 2.5kg, and even with its own compression sack (a good feature) it was too big to squeeze into one of our 65-litre rucksacks, and half-filled the other packs. It would be a better option for a trip with a basecamp, where you camped straight from the car rather than at the end of a trek.

Verdict: An amazing price for such a warm night's sleep, but very bulky.

Rating: ■■■■■■■■■■□□



4 EXPED DOWNMAT LITE 5M, £90,
exped.com

From a tiny 26x13cm chrysalis emerges a rectangular 183x52cm sleep mat as well as a mini pump (it looks like a whoopee cushion and is highly effective) and a puncture repair kit. The mat is 5cm deep and filled with duck down for heat insulation, hence the need for the mini pump – condensation from breath would have a negative impact on the loft of the feathers.

Verdict: With a small pack size, pump and extra insulation this is a very impressive piece of kit.

Rating: ■■■■■■■■■■□□

5 MAMMUT LAHAR MAT, £70,
mammut.ch

A few neat features reveal the thought that has gone into the design of the 183x51cm Lahar. Velcro straps around the mat help to keep it in its super compact 26x12cm roll, while non-slip stripes across the mat aim to stop your sleeping bag from sliding off in the night. At just 2.5cm deep, however, its cushioning is less generous than others so the Lahar is better suited for smooth ground.

Verdict: Light and compact, but less cushioning than others.

Rating: ■■■■■■■■■■□□



6 VANGO AERO LONG, £50,
vango.co.uk

At 198x60cm the Aero Long offers a substantially bigger floor area than its test rivals, and its non-slip print helps to keep you in the middle of the mat. Laid on a groundsheet over grass, its 3cm depth is adequate, but it's the size and the reduced risk of rolling off the edge in the night that really stand out. It packs into a 31x17cm roll.

Verdict: Top value for a very big mat.

Rating: ■■■■■■■■■■□□

Backpacking accessories

A few little luxuries won't add much to your weight but could add heaps to your enjoyment of a trek.

1 PRIMUS ETA LITE COFFEE PRESS, £13, primus.se

This "plunger" turns the aluminium pot on your Eta stove into a cafetiere so you can brew a proper coffee to kick-start your day. Simple and ingenious.

2 LIFEVENTURE PRINTED TREK TRAVEL TOWEL, £19.99, lifeventure.co.uk

Just because you're in the depths of the back country doesn't mean you can forget the basics of human hygiene – especially if you're trekking with mates! This microfiber towel can absorb nine times its own weight in water and dries eight times faster than a cotton towel, so there's no excuse for not washing, regardless of how cold the stream. It's treated with an antibacterial formula to combat odours.

3 GSI SPICE MISSILE, £10.99, rosker.co.uk

If the pun doesn't make you grin every time you see the Spice Missile, the prospect of three waterproof compartments to carry your salt, pepper and spice should bring a smile to your face.

4 GRANGER'S FABSIL GOLD, £17.99, grangers.co.uk

So you're going camping in the UK. It might rain. So make sure your tent doesn't leak by giving it a new lease of life with this water repellent designed specifically for fabrics exposed to the environment for longer periods of time.

5 HELINOX TL130 ADJUSTABLE, £139, helinox.eu

A decent pair of walking poles can boost your balance when carrying a heavy rucksack and lift weight off your ankles, hips and knees by sharing the burden with your arms and shoulders. These very light poles (just 360g) fold instantly into three sections, and re-assemble with a locking system similar to the intersections on a tent. The result is a failsafe lock on the lower two joints, while the third joint which shortens or extends the pole from 115cm to 130cm locks super securely with a simple twist.

6 TREK'N EAT CHICKEN CURRIED RICE, £6.50, trekneat.com

We enjoyed the flavour of this chicken and curried rice dish, although it proved harder to re-hydrate than expected. Each 200g pouch packs nearly 800kcal, including 28g of protein and 116g of carbs, which makes it a really easy way to restore your energy levels. Just pour in 520mls of boiling water and wait 10 minutes before eating.

7 TERRA NOVA TITANIUM PEG, 6 X 2G, £16, terra-nova.co.uk

If you really want to minimise the weight of your pack for an adventure race or long distance trek, these tiny tent pegs will shave a few grammes from your load. Just watch you don't lose the orange painted pegs in yellowing grass. You could halve the weight to 1g pegs, but these are significantly stronger.

8 LIGHT MY FIRE TITANIUM SPORK, £16, lightmyfire.com

The foon (fork/spoon) and even the kung foon (chopstick plus fork/spoon) are trying to muscle into the camp cutlery drawer, but the Spork remains king, and in titanium it's light, strong and simple to clean.

9 EXPED AIRPILLOW ULTRALIGHT, £25, exped.com

Whatever combination you try of fleece, down jacket or even socks in a drybag, it will never create the comfort of your pillow at home. This AirPillow is about half the size of a domestic pillow and at 10cm deep offers the chance of a decent night's kip.



Fuji Norcom Straight 2.1

Marc Abbott discovers this bike built for speed is best suited for those of us in it for the long run.

THE JOY OF some bikes isn't in their super-light weight, nor is it in their array of exotic components such as electronic gearing. Sometimes it isn't even about clever engineering or design solutions. Some bikes, like this Fuji Norcom Straight 2.1 are just eminently comfortable over serious distance. And in the Norcom's case, that makes it a serious contender if you're looking for a long-distance triathlon or time trial bike.

For starters, the long-distance comfort that defines the Norcom is easy to achieve. There's plenty of room on the steerer to juggle spacers for correct handlebar height, and plenty of adjustability in both the saddle position and handlebar extensions. Deeply-padded arm rests and a super-sumptuous Oval Concepts T900 perch ensure that two of your three contact points are spot-on. You could sit on the point of that saddle all day long.

On the down-side; crosswinds, and Oval carbon clinchers make uneasy bedfellows. Things get a bit dicey when the deep-profile rims catch a gust. However, the wheels come into their own on flat roads when you've a chance to get them up to speed. Once your speed nudges past the 23mph mark, you're on to a banker, as the bike whips with serious speed that you feel you could hold for as

long as the road is level. Or until you encounter more crosswinds. A shrouded rear wheel and brakes hidden out of the airflow (behind the bottom bracket and behind the forks) show that some serious thought has been given to aerodynamic performance.

It's a surprisingly adept bike when the going gets lumpy too, helped by a substantially stiff carbon frame that allows you to get the power to the ground, either seated or standing, depending on the length or gradient of the hill. Once you're over the top of the climb, the standard 53/39 double chainset gives that little extra push to get up to speed on the descent, and doesn't seem to noticeably handicap progress on the climbs. Truth be told, a mid-compact, 52/36 chainset would improve its climbing ability without affecting top speed too much on the downhills, but if you're buying this bike mainly for straight-line, flat-out speed, you're probably better off with the gearing it comes with as standard.

So, although this isn't the lightest bike we've ever tested – or even the lightest TT bike – it will find its place in any event that requires comfort as well as endurance. Stepping up from club 10s to 25- or 50-mile time trials, or going further than a sprint tri? This bike should be on your shopping list.



FUJI NORCOM STRAIGHT 2.1

Price £2,400

Weight 8.86kg

Frame Carbon-fibre

Fork Carbon-fibre

Chainset Shimano Ultegra, 53/39

Gears Shimano Ultegra, 11-speed (11-25)

Brakes TRP aero

Wheels Oval Concept 950F carbon clinchers

Tyres Vittoria Zaffiro (700 x 23)

More info evanscycles.com



"Stepping up from club 10s to 25- or 50-mile time trials, or going further than a sprint tri? This bike should be on your shopping list."



Long-term tests

The kit we've been putting through its paces this summer.

1 OMM MOUNTAIN RAID 1.6 £190

theomm.com

For most mountain marathons you need to be self-sufficient and unless you've decided to lug a gas barbecue along, your sleeping bag will be your heaviest item. So you want to go light, but not so light that you're forced with the horrifying dilemma of cuddling up to your running partner (no one's very attractive after a day on the OMM Elite course) or freezing to death. OMM's Mountain Raid 1.6 is desirably light at 450g, and it's insulated with PrimaLoft Gold, so it'll retain warmth if it gets wet. However, for various reasons, OMM don't submit their bags to standard temperature benchmarks. They say it's aimed at "experienced users", i.e. those who are comfortable going without some comfort. But how warm is it? I used it at the Great Lakeland 3 Day mountain marathon in a pretty soggy early May. I wouldn't have been warm enough in it wearing just a T-shirt. But I chucked on my down jacket, too, and I slept like a log. And for summer adventures it's perfect.

Damian Hall, contributor

2 HOY VULPINE VALLDEMOSSA RACE JERSEY, £34.99

evanscycles.com

Teaming up with lifestyle cycling brand Vulpine, Britain's greatest cycling Olympian has created a small range of riding kit with neat design twists. This jersey, for example, has an eye-popping red zip and a Hoy V print on the rear pocket. The two outside rear pockets are angled for easier access on the fly, and the short stretch of grippers do a good job of keeping the hem in place. Perhaps surprisingly, given its co-creator, this is a more relaxed than race-cut jersey, ideal for Sunday club runs and sportive rides, and the fabric has a snug softness to it. It's currently available for half price at £34.99, which makes it a steal.

Jonathan Manning, contributing editor

3 GOODYEAR ATLANTIS, £46

goodyearfootwear.com

Bargain boots tend to come with a "buyer beware" warning, but so far these Goodyear boots have proved good companions for easy outdoor wear. They're light and flexible, which makes them comfortable for mucking about on campsites or strolling across fields for a Sunday pub lunch, but they lack the stiffness and support required for stability on rocky, uneven terrain, which is a shame because the grip is particularly good.

Jonathan Manning, contributing editor

4 ON CLOUDCRUISER, £125

on-running.com

You know when you read in magazines like this, that perfect runs are all about floating along, as if you're on a cloud. Can you recall such an occasion... really? Well, the On Cloudcruiser certainly promises such delights and you know what, it also goes a long way to delivering such dreams of comfort. This is a light – competitively so – shoe that sits on a broad base of what's best described as air. In cartoons shoes have springs (pods in this instance), and while these won't provide superhuman-like powers, you will enjoy the soft, responsive feel they have. The manufacturers tell

us they're designed to tackle the foe that is concrete: and yes, this is a shoe that does that. Science nerds will love the three-dimensional mesh and the hollow pods on the sole of the shoe, others will simply love the feel.

Paul Larkins, contributor

5 FUGOO TOUGH BLUETOOTH ACTIVE, £82.60

FUGOO.com

Outdoor fitness sessions are on the rise – but many of these bootcamps and military fitness workouts involve suffering in relative silence. Well, the Fugoo + Tough Go Anywhere Speaker appears to be the answer to that call for that all-important motivational music backing track for any outdoor training sessions. It's an ultra-rugged, shockproof speaker – though thankfully really lightweight at around 16oz – with Bluetooth function and a 40-hour battery life. It'll strap to a bike or kayak – providing studio quality backing tracks – and we found no amount of moisture, mud or dropping on the ground seems to dull the sound.

The FUGOO Bluetooth speaker line is available at Amazon UK at prices starting from £149.99.

Rob Kemp, contributor

6 SMARTWOOL PHD RUN GRADUATED COMPRESSION ULTRA LIGHT SOCK, £26

smartwool.com

On both the Dragon's Back and the Spine races this year, these socks pretty much saved my bacon. Tendonitis up the front of the shin is fairly common on multi-day events, or at least it is with me. A medic on the Spine Race suggested I wear compression socks. Luckily I'd brought some along to wear post-race, to try and coax my angry calves back to reality. However, wearing them during the race both kept my tendonitis in check and started the calf peace talks early. The same happened in Wales this June. Even on shorter races I'll pop them on straight after, often for the drive home, and I'm certain they help with recovery. I've been wearing them for two years and the compression shows no signs of lessening either. And as they're merino wool, they're warm too. Whoever named the socks got a bit carried away, but they're a wonderfully effective bit of kit.

Damian Hall, contributor

7 OXFORD F21 TORNADO, £34.99

oxprod.com

I was chatting to a bike mechanic the day after he'd had an almighty crash while mountain biking downhill. His battered full-face helmet revealed the potentially catastrophic impact he'd avoided, and was destined for display on the shop wall. "I'll need a new one," he reflected ruefully, "but that's why I wear a helmet." While his replacement helmet will cost a good three figures, head protection is available for a lot less cash and still does the job. This F21 conforms to CE standards, which test field of vision, shock absorption, and retention systems (straps). And while it's not the lightest I've ever worn nor the most breathable, its 21 vents do allow for reasonable ventilation and there's good adjustment in the straps for a snug fit. A quick web search found prices as low as £26.24, which is a bargain if you're just getting into biking.

Jonathan Manning, contributing editor







Reader challenge

Three friends united by a love of endurance challenges have just set a new record for cycling between and summiting Britain's Three Peaks.

"We're all very relieved," says Dug Wilders, a Sheffield-based property photographer, who with Andy Graham and Spike Ambery-Smith completed the 436-mile odyssey between Snowdon, Scafell Pike and Ben Nevis in 42 hours and 55 minutes, beating the previous record by 3 hours and 25 minutes.

"It was our second attempt – we tried last year but got lost in Glasgow and realised we were not going to make it. This year we were much stronger and way more organised."

Key differences included a more disciplined strategy for taking breaks, and a switch to slower release foods for energy.

"If you don't have a set distance between breaks then the gap between them gets ever shorter," said Wilders. "Last time we took too many breaks and stopped for too long."

This time the three had a 20-minute break every 50 miles, although sleep was still hard to find. Two of the team managed a 20-minute kip during the entire challenge, while the third failed to sleep due to heat exhaustion.

Fuelling was another area for significant improvement.

"The first time around we relied on sugar too much, which was great for the first day but we all started to suffer from mouth ulcers," said Wilders. "This time we ate a hot bowl of pasta, porridge or rice at every break, getting long-lasting energy in, but by the end of the second day our bodies were still rejecting food."

The record-breakers were backed by a team of four, two in an immediate support car and another two in a van that drove ahead to set up the next feed station and cook the hot food.

Physical preparation for the challenge included lengthy fell runs and long-distance rides, but the three athletes were no strangers to extreme endurance.

"We're all in our late twenties, all having done various stupid challenges in the past! One of us cycled Land's End to John O'Groats in under four days, a month before the challenge; one had cycled from Ben Nevis to Mont Blanc and climbed both in 10 days, and I've done a 7000km

tour round New Zealand," said Wilders.

Not that the challengers ran up the mountains, rather they seized the opportunity instead to change into looser fitting clothing and refuel and recuperate on the ascents and descents of the highest peaks in Wales, England and Scotland.

The record they broke is the purist form of the Three Peaks Challenge established by John McAvoy. This includes no use of the Mersey Tunnel (it's not always open to cyclists) and all participants have to finish the mission (to avoid record-breakers drafting behind a big peloton between the peaks).

"We are quite keen to make this the 'John McAvoy Challenge', a bit like the Bob Graham round," said Wilders. "To get in 'the club' you have to complete it in under 48 hours. It would be a sign of recognition to the people who first conceived the idea."

As for the trio's future, "We have the bug and need to find something else achievable. We're not amazing cyclists or runners, but we are good at grinning and bearing it," said Wilders.

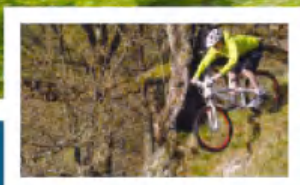
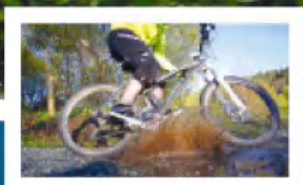
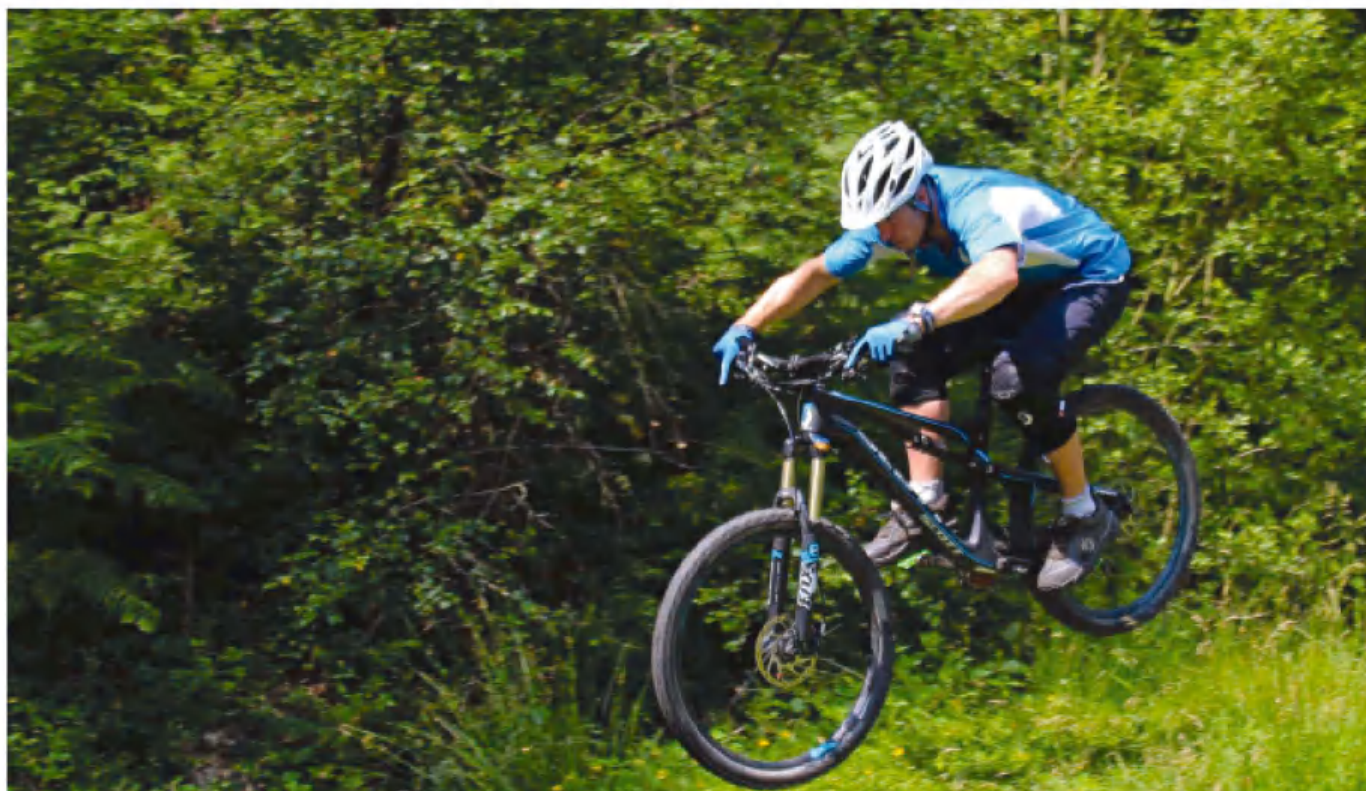
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